Couture

secrets

Inside a Designer Jacket

Subtle quilting, hand-finished seams, a chain weight hem, and fine trims are hallmarks of this classic garment

BY SUSAN KHALJE (FROM ISSUE #121)

In the list of iconic fashion garments, there are a few classics that are included without fail: the little black dress, the crisp white shirt, the belted trench coat, and the classic French cardigan jacket. What they share is an uncomplicated elegance and a clever marriage of fabric, fit, and design. But in none of these garments is the partnership more splendid than in the cardigan jacket. With the added element of sewing techniques that brilliantly bring the design to life, it's no wonder the term "classic" so aptly applies.

I've always been a devotee of haute couture sewing, starting way back when my grandmother was a client at New York's couture salon Chez Cez et Bez. When a wrist injury cut short my career as a classical pianist, I applied for a job almost on a lark at Chez Cez et Bez. To my amazement, I was hired to train with the most talented designers and seamstresses, and at the salon, I was able to poke around in boxes of fantastic garments from various couture houses. Packages from Chanel were my favorites—when I inspected the garments' seams or oh-so-carefully peeked inside a lining, I was amazed by the fine, ingenious handiwork.

In the following pages, I will show you how to sew the four key features of a classic cardigan jacket—quilted rows of stitches that anchor the soft bouclé fashion fabric to a slinky lining; hand-finished seams that provide hidden strength and support; a hard-working and decorative chain weight at the hem; and bold trim and buttons for design interest and stability. There really is nothing like a classic French cardigan jacket, and every woman deserves to have the simple style, luxury, and utter comfort of this unique garment in her wardrobe.

Susan Khalje (SusanKhalje.com) is a couturier and couture sewing teacher, host of DIY.net's "Sew Much More," and Threads' *newest contributing editor.*

"Luxury must remain almost invisible,

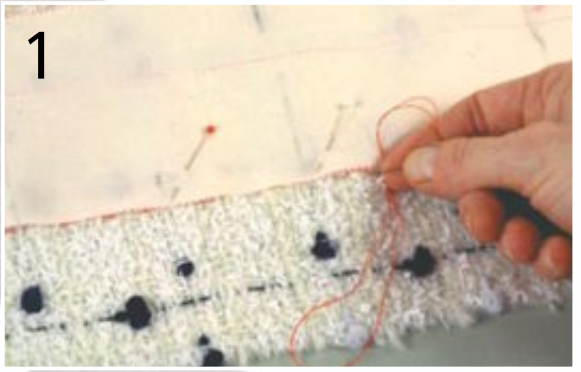
Jacket provided by Chanel USA, from the Fall 2005-2006 collection.

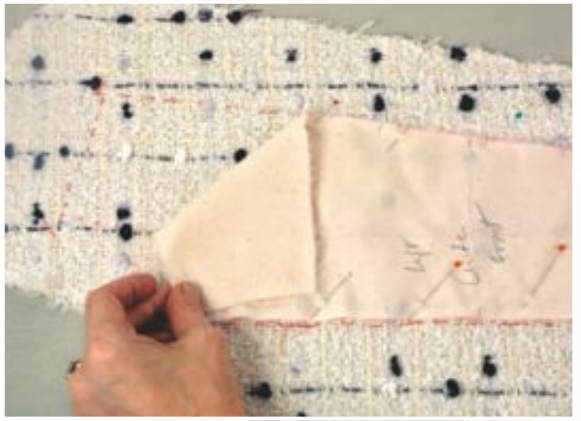
but it must be felt..."
—Coco Chanel

Quilt the fashion fabric directly to the lining

Soft, drapey wool bouclés are typical of a cardigan jacket. They're backed by a charmeuse or crepe de Chine lining and supported by machine quilting. The effect is soft, with just the right amount of underlying structure.

1. Fit a muslin, then use the muslin pieces as your pattern. When you are pleased with the fit, rip out all stitches and press the pieces flat. To help align the muslin pieces along the lengthwise and crosswise grain of your fabric, cut off the seam allowances, and draw grainlines that extend to the seamlines on each piece. Lay out your wool in a single layer, then carefully position your full set of muslin pattern pieces (left and right fronts, left and right sleeves, etc.) along the fabric's grains. Using a double length of contrast thread, baste around each muslin piece to clearly identify your seamlines and hemlines, then cut out with at least a two-inch seam allowance.





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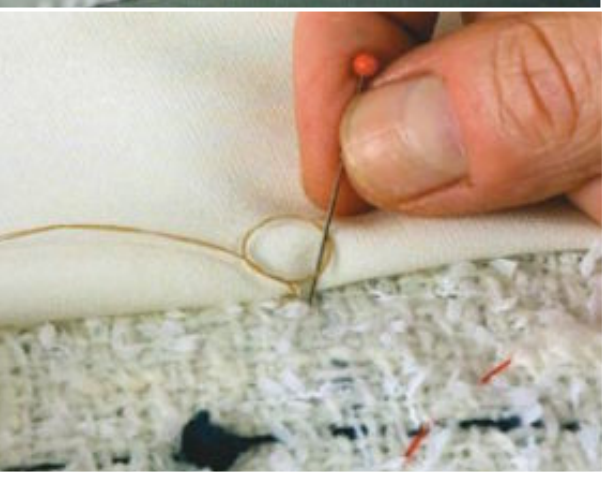
Quilt the fashion fabric... *continued*



2. Layer the lining and fabric piece, then quilt vertical lines about one inch apart. Place the charmeuse wrong side up on a flat surface, then place the cut fabric pieces right side up on top, making sure the grainlines are perfectly aligned. Cut the charmeuse roughly in the same shape as each fabric piece (no need to be precise yet), then mark the quilting lines with pins spaced one inch apart. Machine-quilt along the pinned lines using a walking foot, on 3mm stitch length, and holding the fabric taut as you sew. Stitch all quilt lines in the same direction, and start and stop one inch from seamlines, and two inches from hemlines. To keep the lines straight, you may not be able to extend them all the way to the top of the jacket's side panels.

3. Tie off the thread ends between the layers. As you quilt, don't back-tack at either end; this looks messy and can distort the fabrics. Instead, pull up each pair of threads between the wool and charmeuse layers and knot them securely with jeweler's knot (tied around a pin at left). Clip the thread ends down to ½ inch.

tip

Extra-wide seam allowances are a must

The loosely woven bouclé frays considerably during the construction process. Wide allowances also allow for any pulling up of the fabric during quilting. And because the armholes of cardigan jackets are typically high and tight, this extra fabric provides more opportunities for fit adjustments.

Hand-finish the lining seams

Hand-finished seams provide a cardigan jacket with hidden strength. Sewing by hand also allows better control of the slippery fabrics. I call this the "woolly mammoth" stage—the wide seam allowances are frayed.

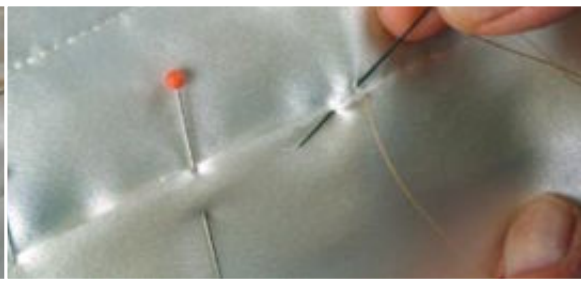
1. Machine-baste the pieces along the traced lines, but don't catch the lining. Pin the fabric pieces together along the hand-basted seamlines. Use a walking foot and a long stitch length (I used 5mm) to join the fabric pieces, and hold or pin the charmeuse out of the way as you stitch. Try on the garment to evaluate the fit, and when satisfied, stitch the seams for real. Remove any stray basting lines.

2. Press the seam allowances open, then trim. Using a sleeve board to isolate the seam, press the seam allowances open. Trim them down to about ¾ inch (leave as much as you can to strengthen the seamlines, but make sure the seam allowances will clear the nearest line of quilting). Press the seam allowances open again.

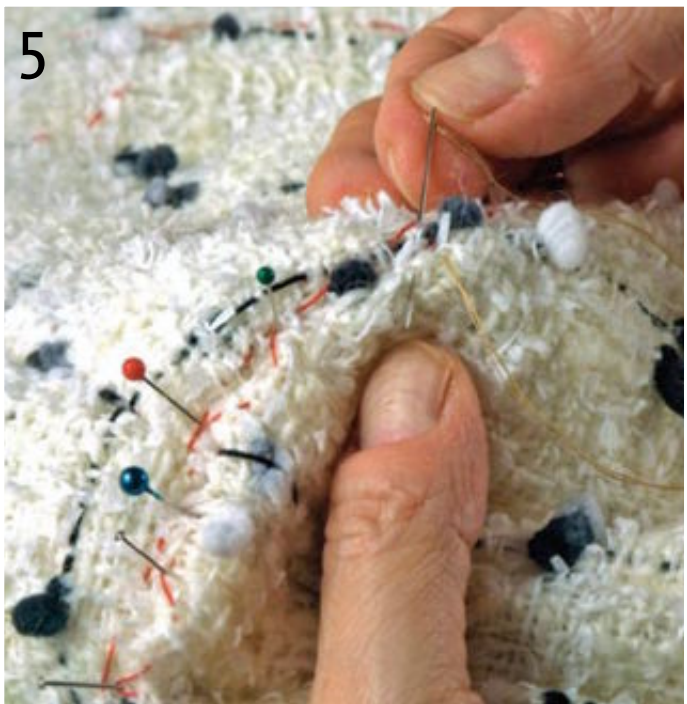
Fell stitches secure all seams of the fluid lining fabric.

3. Overlap the lining layers, using pins to transfer the seamline. Gently smooth one of the charmeuse seam allowances over the garment seamline (do not pull or tug it, though, and make sure the grain doesn't shift), then pin along the seamline as shown at right. Start and stop pinning one inch from seamlines and two inches from hemlines. Trim that seam allowance of the charmeuse down to about ¾ inch. Overlap the other charmeuse seam allowance, and lightly press over the pins. The pin heads create indentations in the charmeuse, indicating the seamline. Trim this seam allowance as well, ¾ inch from indentations.

4. Fold the upper layer of lining in place, then secure with fell stitches. Fold under the charmeuse along the indentation and pin in place. Gently press to create a sharp foldline, which will be easier to sew. Lift the garment off the sleeve board and secure with a fell stitch, catching the wool underneath.



5. Set the sleeve by hand and finish the neck and center front. Place the garment on a dressform and pin the sleeve in place. The sleeves are then easiest to sew in by hand—the all-important grainlines can be perfectly positioned and controlled, and any extra fullness in the cap area is easy to distribute. Staystitch the fashion fabric's neckline and center front, then trim, clip, and turn the seam allowance to the inside. Trim, clip, and turn the lining (cheating the lining about ⅛ inch to the inside), then secure it to the fashion fabric with small, tight fell stitches.



Insert a chain weight at the hem

The weight of bold buttons on a classic French cardigan jacket pulls the jacket forward. A chain at the hem served as a counterbalance; it also encouraged the jacket's back to hang close to the body. It's really only needed in the back, but for style, run it along the entire hem.

1. **Hem the fashion fabric with a very loose catchstitch.** Pin the lining out of the way, then press up the fashion fabric along the basted hemline; trim the hem allowance so it rests along the base of the quilting lines. Hold in place with a loose catchstitch.

2. **Secure the lining with a catchstitch.** To make turning easier, first baste the lining's vertical seams closed. Then finger-press the lining in place, ⅜ inch from the jacket hemline. Finish the vertical seams and the lower edge of the lining with fell stitches.

3. **Hand-sew the chain right below the lining.** Pin the chain in place—it should not be too tight (this will gather up the fabric), or too loose (an unwanted flare will result). Strengthen a double thread with beeswax, and secure the top and bottom of each link using small backstitches.

Apply a special trim and buttons

Use a single purchased trim, combine or layer trims and ribbons, or fringe your own trim for a unique look. You'll need about five yards of trim to embellish all of the jacket edges, sleeve vents, and pocket edges.

1. **Create fringed trim from your fashion fabric.** Cut two strips of fabric about two inches wide, then pull threads to the desired fringe width. The fabric may have different fibers in the lengthwise and crosswise grains, so experiment to see which gives the most interesting fringe. Layer the strips together, then sew a ribbon or trim down the center.

2. **Pin the trim in place, folding under loose ends and manipulating it around corners.** Using a single length of thread in a color that blends in with the trim, firmly secure both edges of the trim with tiny backstitches.

tip

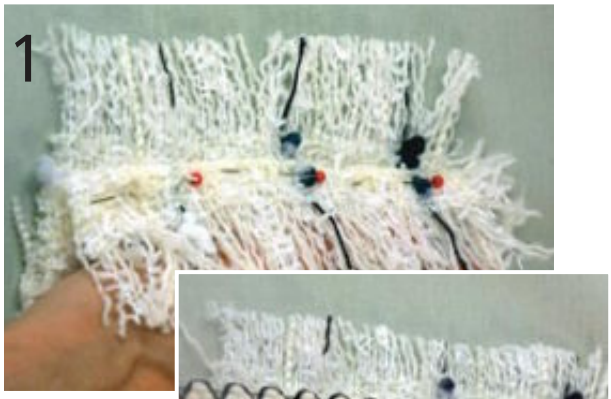
Chain weight should match fabric weight

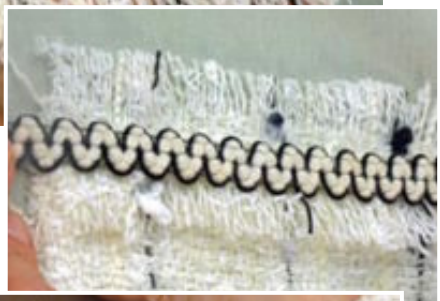
There are a variety of chain weights to choose from; you'll need to hold a few different ones in your hand to get a feel for what will work best in your jacket. As a general rule, use a larger, heavier chain with a heavier wool, and a smaller, lighter one with lighter-weight wools. You'll need enough chain to circle the hem of your jacket (3 to 4 feet usually does the job).

tip

Trim a pocket before you attach it

Fold and firmly press the fabric into your desired shape, then add the trim to the top edge. Fell-stitch a matching lining in place, and sew the pockets on by hand with beeswax-coated double thread and a firm fell stitch.





(author's own pattern)

START WITH THE RIGHT PATTERN

A classic cardigan jacket is gently shaped and usually collarless. Look for a pattern with princess seams that extend from the shoulder; the quilting will be more effective. The signature three-piece sleeve allows for better vent placement, as well as fine-tuning the fit, but a two-piece sleeve will also work. Here are a few patterns that give you a designer cardigan style.

Burda 8414	**McCall's 4311**	**Simplicity 4971**
Butterick 4028	**Simplicity 4954**	**Vogue 7975**

SOURCES

LINTON TWEEDS LTD
(produces much of Chanel's fabric)
Shaddon Mills
Carlisle, Cumbria CA2 5TZ
England
011-44-1228-512062
LintonTweeds.co.uk

MENDEL GOLDBERG FABRICS
(Chanel-type bouclés and matching charmeuse linings)
72 Hester Street
New York, NY 10018
212-925-9110
Email them at MendelGoldbergNY@aol. com

M&J TRIMMING
(fancy trims and buttons)
1008 and 1000 Sixth Avenue
New York, NY 10018
212-391-6200
MJTrim.com

TINSEL TRADING COMPANY
(fancy trims and buttons)
47 West 38th Street
New York, NY 10018
212-730-1030
TinselTrading.com

TOHO SHOJI (NEW YORK) INC.
(gold and silver chains, sold by the foot)
990 Sixth Avenue
New York, NY 10018
212-868-7465
TohoShojiNY.com

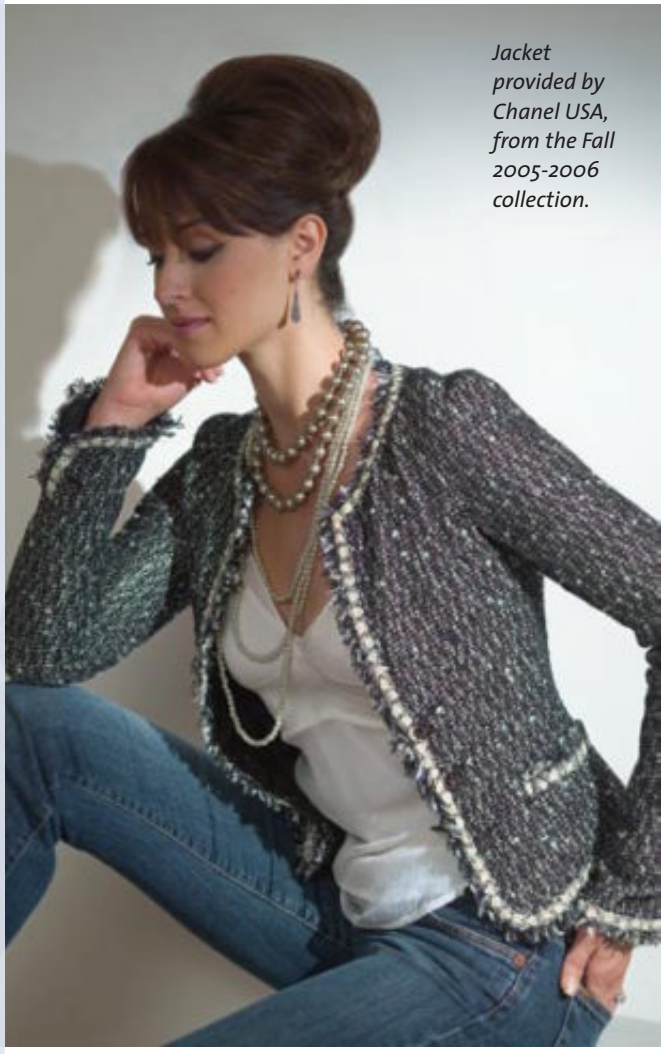
History of a Timeless Garment

It's one thing to be a designer who reflects the mood of the times; it's quite another to be a visionary.

Coco Chanel (1883-1971), who early on encouraged women to dress with ease, confidence, and elegance, once stated, "I want to be a part of what is to come." And with faultless taste, audacity, and determination, she was. Chanel's garments were astoundingly different from the tightly corseted garments of the not-so-distant Belle Epoque, and they suited a generation of women who were entering the workforce, driving motorcars, and participating in sports.

The design provenance of the now-famous Chanel suit is variously ascribed to Tyrolean jackets, military dress, riding clothes of the British aristocracy, even bellhops' uniforms. Regardless, it's an eminently wearable balance of a basic jacket/cardigan and brilliant ornamentation. Most of all, it supports Chanel's claim, "Elegance in clothes means freedom to move freely."

> "Luxury is the coat a woman throws on the reverse on a chair ... and the inside is more precious than the outside."
>
> —Coco Chanel



Jacket provided by Chanel USA, from the Fall 2005-2006 collection.

Model photos: Jack Deutsch; hair and makeup: Sylvia Pichler; process photos: Jen Sauer; all other photos Sloan Howard.

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Setting a sleeve by hand

Keep your eye on the grain and take it a stitch at a time

(from issue # 122)

After "Inside a Chanel Jacket" appeared in issue 121, many readers requested more information about sewing a sleeve into a jacket by hand. For all of you, this is unquestionably a master class technique.

The exquisitely set sleeves we admire in haute couture don't happen by accident. Control is the key element to their success—control of fit, fabric, and the techniques used to shape the fabric into the desired form.

Successfully setting in and sewing a sleeve by hand starts by carefully fitting the sleeve and choosing an appropriate fabric that works well with the technique. This haute couture technique enables you to position the horizontal and vertical grainlines perfectly, ensure a full range of motion in your sleeve, and establish a well-placed and elegant armscye seam.

A WELL-FITTED MUSLIN IS ESSENTIAL

Although fitting the fashion fabric establishes the final sleeve placement, the groundwork laid in the muslin fitting is essential. It allows you to determine the circumference at the top of the sleeve and armscye, mark the exact placement of the sleeve at the end of the shoulder seam, and establish the amount of arm movement.

Equally critical is choosing a fabric that lends itself to shaping, especially in the sleeve-cap area, and is lofty enough to hide the hand stitches. A soft wool boucle, such as the one shown at right, is a perfect choice.

If both the horizontal and vertical grains aren't

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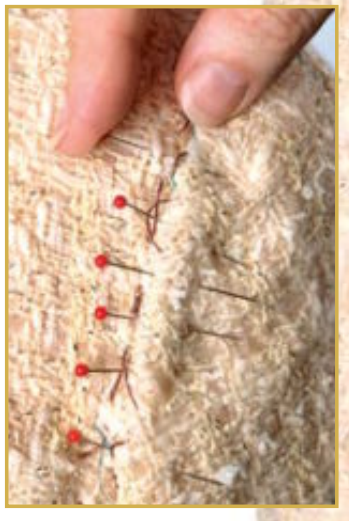
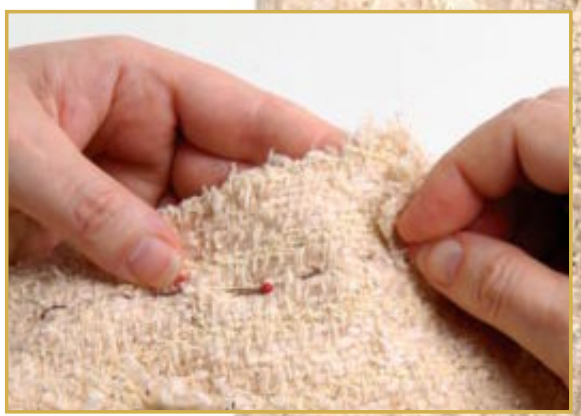




obvious in your fabric, mark them clearly with basting thread on the sleeve pieces so you can easily refer to them. Measure the length of the sleeve-cap seamline; it should be 1¼ to 1½ inches larger than the circumference of the armscye seamline.

The higher the armscye under the arm, the greater the arm movement, but it mustn't be uncomfortably tight. Clearly mark with basting thread any changes made during the fitting. Unless the body indicates otherwise, your two armscye seamlines and two sleeve seamlines should be identical.

Once you've perfected the fit, cut the fashion fabric with 2-inch seam allowances. Mark the seamlines with basting stitches in contrasting thread before you begin.

Susan Khalje is a Threads *contributing editor.*

Shape a graceful sleeve cap

Shaping serves two purposes: It creates an elegant contour and a seamline devoid of uneven fabric distribution and bumps, and it allows excess fabric to be eased in.

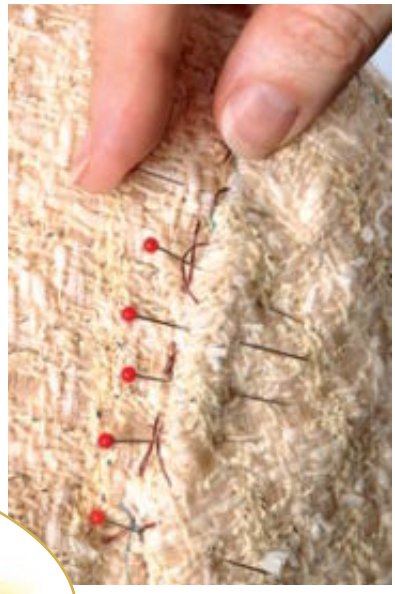
If the sleeve circumference is considerably larger than the armscye circumference—due to a full upper arm, for example—then the excess fabric needs to be reduce to create a smooth armscye seam.

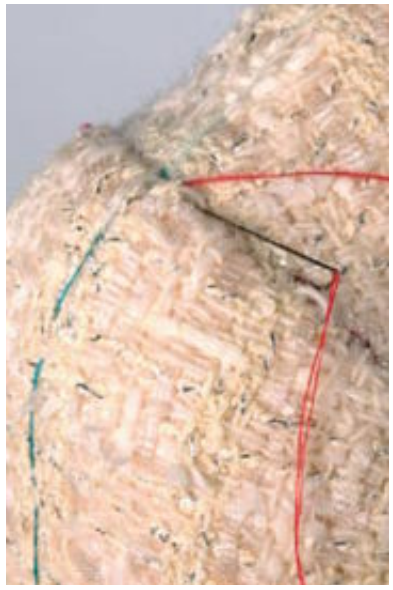
There are a number of ways to ease the sleeve-cap seamline into the armscye: You can shrink the fabric with steam or apply gathering stitches to the seam allowance and pull them, almost like a drawstring, to reduce the excess. If there's a seam down the outside of the arm, as there would be in a three-piece sleeve, you can taper the shoulder end of the seam to pare down some of the sleeve's fullness. Finally, you can apply subtle rows of hand-stitching horizontally across the sleeve-cap area and pull them to compress the fabric.

Photos: Sloan Howard. Drawings: Carol Ruzicka.

Sew the upper half of the sleeve

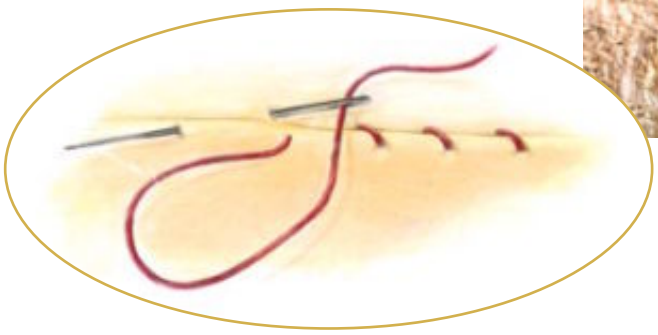
Pin your well-fitted sleeve into place in the following manner:





First, fold the sleeve's seam allowances under along the sleeve's basted seamline—toward the sleeve. Keeping the vertical and horizontal grainlines perpendicular and parallel to the floor, respectively, bring the sleeve-cap and armscye basting stitches together, and pin the upper half of the sleeve into place. The very top of the sleeve may or may not line up with the shoulder seam, but at this point, grain placement is the more critical issue.

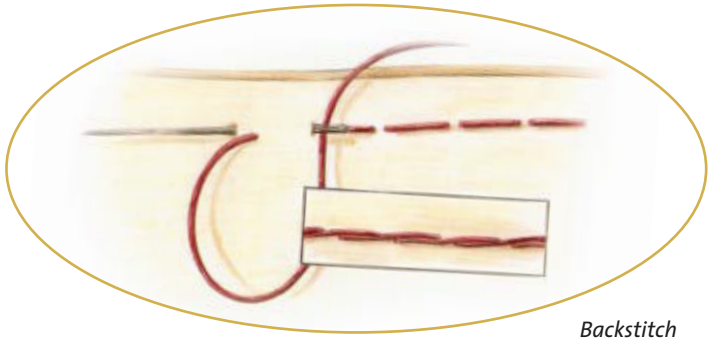
Sew the pinned section of the sleeve together from the outside using small, firm fell stitches and doubled thread coated with beeswax.



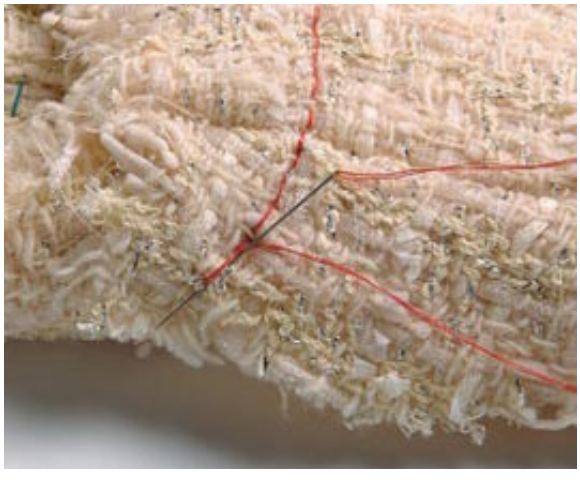
Fell stitches

Sew the underarm sleeve section

Working from the inside of the garment, hold the lower half of the sleeve and the lower half of the armscye together; they should fall into place with their stitching lines layered neatly one on top of the other.



Backstitch



Pin them together along their basted seamlines, from the bodice side, and sew the lower half of the seam with backstitches—small and firm, perfectly placed on the basting line, using, as before, doubled thread coated with beeswax.

Put the garment on a dress form and check the grainlines, the contour of the seam, the fit, and the sleeve movement. It's relatively easy to make adjustments now before cleaning up the inside of the sleeve.

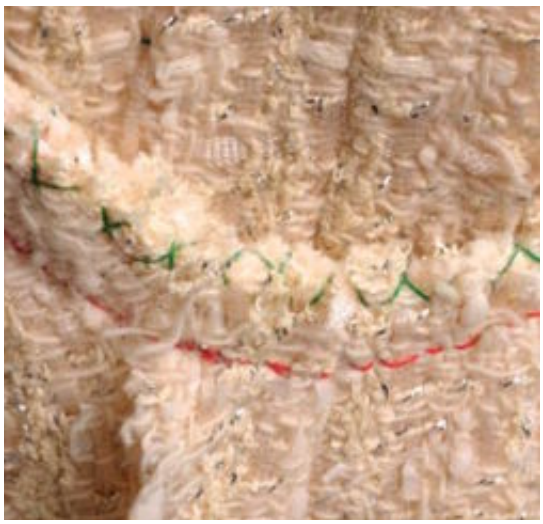
continued

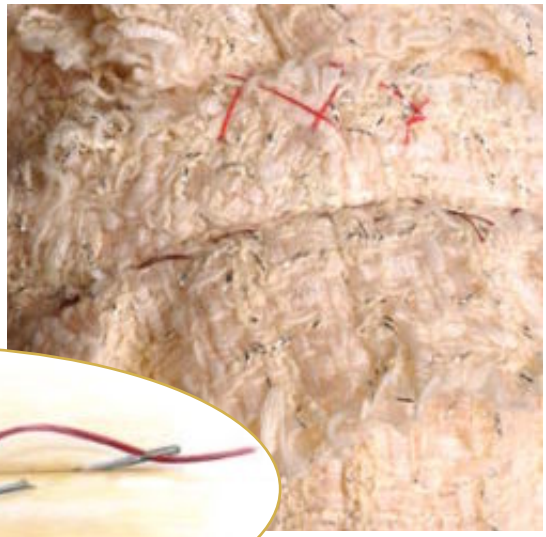
Open the seam allowances

One of the secrets to a smooth shoulder line is to divide—or open—the seam allowances at the top of the sleeve.

The bodice seam allowance folds toward the garment, and the sleeve seam allowance folds toward the sleeve. This necessitates clipping the bodice seam allowance in order to allow it to fold back toward the garment. Clip about 3 inches from either side of the shoulder seam. Tack the opened seam allowance to the shoulder seam, as shown. Do not open the lower seam allowances under the arm; they remain together.

Trim the upper seam allowances to about 1 inch. Trim the lower seam allowances to about ½ inch. To keep the lower seam allowances from fraying, firmly and thoroughly overcast the raw edges together.





Overcast stitch

BEESWAX ISN'T ENOUGH

Beeswax not only conditions your thread for easier sewing, it strengthens it, too. To get the full benefit from the beeswax, thread your needle and draw the thread through the wax. Then iron the waxed thread. With hand-sewing, it's a good idea to thread a few needles with an 18-inch length of doubled thread; that way, you won't have to stop sewing to rethread and wax your needle.

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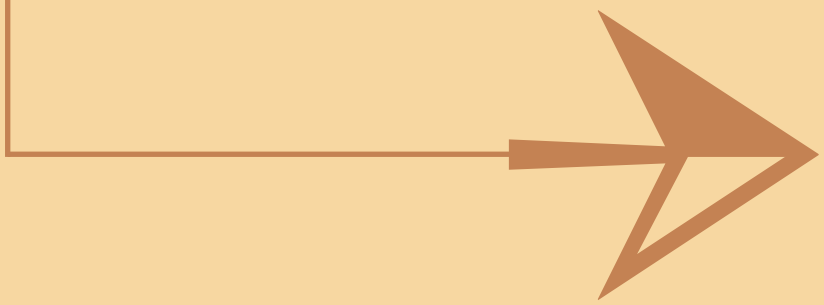


CONQUERING

An organdy reinforcement ensures a smooth, sharp turn

by Shirley Smith
(from issue #101)

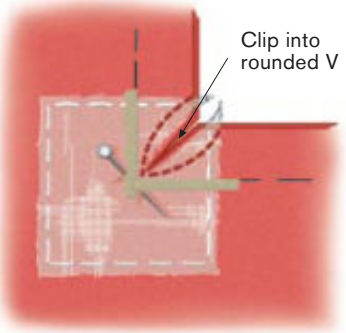
Seamlines that incorporate sharp inside corners are cropping up in more and more patterns these days, including most designs with gussets, all shawl collars and some full-roll collars, and many designs with insets of one sort or another, such as bands. No matter how much trouble you may have had sewing inset corners before—or even if you've avoided them altogether— rest assured that they can be managed easily with the simple steps provided in the drawings

TO SEW AN INSET CORNER

These diagrams show a 90-degree corner, but the process works for corners of any angle.

1. Reinforce seamline of inside corner *with a small piece of organdy on RS of fabric. Baste, pin, or glue-tack organdy in place and mark seamlines with tape or pencil. I use 3M FineLine Tape for marking (it's available in narrow widths from auto-supply stores).*

2. Stitch a rounded V into corner *with short machine stitches, pivoting one thread-width short of seamline. Clip to pivot point without catching thread. A pin placed diagonally across point will keep scissors from overcutting.*



3. Remove tape and basting.
Press organdy toward s.a. of clip so it will be out of the way; it will not lie flat.

Photos: Sloan Howard

ONLINE EXTRA

Visit *www.threadsmagazine.com* to see a video of the author sewing an inset corner seam.

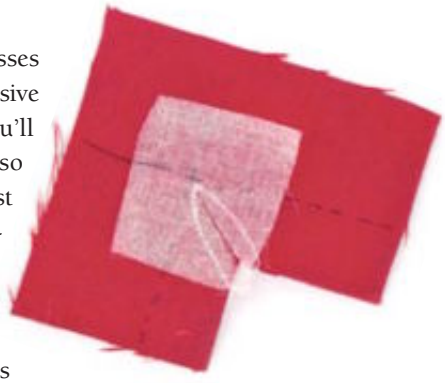
INSET CORNERS

below. You can use this method with all types of fabrics and in all situations.

Reinforce the pivot point

The only out-of-the-ordinary supply you'll need for this approach is a scrap of Swiss cotton organdy, which acts as a nearly undetectable and very sturdy reinforcement for the clipped seam allowances involved. This is a wonderful utility fabric to keep on hand for any reinforcing needs, because it's very tightly woven, so it doesn't ravel; very thin, so it adds almost no bulk; and very crisp, so it presses flat. It's sometimes quite expensive and difficult to find, but you'll only use small pieces of it, so ½ yard or even ¼ yard will last you a long time. Cotton organdy can be quickly pre-shrunk by hand-washing and ironing it while it's still wet. You can order it from the shops listed in "Organdy sources by mail" at right. You'll love it! ♦

Shirley Smith writes and teaches in White Salmon, Wash. Visit her on the Web at www.sewingarts.com.



A square of cotton organdy will make any corner seam stronger and smoother. Baste the organdy to the RS of the fabric and sew a V into the pivot point, as shown in photo above. Then clip into the corner.

Organdy sources by mail

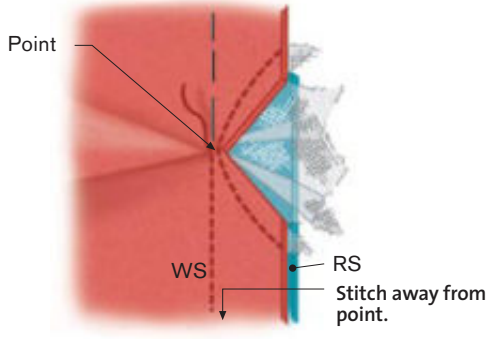
G Street Fabrics
11854 Rockville Pike
Rockville, MD 20852
800-333-9191
www.gstreetfabrics.com

Haberman Fabrics
117 W. 4th St.
Royal Oak, MI 48067
248-541-0010
www.habermanfabrics.com

Cy Rudnick's Fabrics
2450 Grand Ave.
Kansas City, MO 64108
816-842-7808

Sew Fancy
480 Hood Rd.
Markham, ON, L3R 9Z3 Canada
905-470-0433, 800-739-3629
or
PMB 258
107 Court St.
Watertown, NY 13601
www.sewfancy.com

4. Mark seamlines on corner to be inset, and place piece RS up. *With organdy held out of the way, place reinforced corner WS up on top of corner to be inset, aligning pivot points and seamlines on right-hand edge. Starting at pivot point and leaving long thread tails, sew seam on right-hand edge. Remove from machine.*



5. Pivot reinforced fabric at corner to align left-hand edge of inset, *and starting at pivot point again, sew seam. Pull all thread tails to inset side and tie off.*

6. Press seam open, *or as directed on pattern. Trim corner s.a. on inset piece to form miter and then whipstitch edges together. Trim organdy flush with edges of clip and overcast by hand. If fabric ravels, fold organdy over clip edge and then trim and overcast.*

Drawings: Carol Ruzicka

Issey Miyake: Designer for the Millenium

Fold and finish your own versions from commercial patterns

By Marcy Tilton
(from issue #35)

If I could wear the clothes of only one designer, the decision would be easy: Issey Miyake. His clothes are classics in the true sense of the word. They belong to a time all their own and can be worn by anyone, regardless of age, figure type, or gender. Miyake's fans are legion and diverse, ranging from jazz trumpeter Miles Davis to designer Giorgio Armani.

Miyake is one of a handful of designers who contracts with Vogue Patterns to provide patterns of selected items from his ready-to-wear line. I am a passionate and prolific sewer. To me, the acid test for a successful garment is its longevity in my active wardrobe. The only garments that have made it beyond two years are Miyake's. I'm still wearing clothes I made from the very first Vogue Issey Miyake pattern.

I always make it a point to look at Miyake's ready-to-wear collection for ideas and inspiration, and to get a feeling for his themes and motivations, but I never "copy" or even attempt to re-create them exactly. One of the reasons I enjoy working with his shapes and designs is that I become stimulated and excited about making them work for me—my life, my figure, and the fabrics that I find. I wear his clothes almost every day; some are very knock-around casual, some are perfect for business, others make just the right statement for lectures and presentations, and some I save for evening and dressy occasions.

Issey Miyake clothing is fun to make and wear. Each garment can function as a building block in any wardrobe. I buy all the patterns because the designs have a longevity and style that no other designer's clothes have, and the pieces from different patterns often work with one another. Like old friends, the patterns become better and better and more fun with use and experience. I've shortened a dress pattern to make a spectacular top, lengthened a jacket pattern to make a raincoat, modified the long sleeves of a blouse to make a camp shirt, and added a belt and buttons to pleats. Miyake's clothes give your taste and personal style room to grow and change, for he is usually ahead and beyond the fashion game.

I'd like to share what I've learned about appropriate fabrics to use, characteristics you're likely to see in Miyake's designs, and the sewing challenges the designs create so that you can make some really wonderful versions of your own.

Yours for the sewing: *Miyake Vogue patterns encompass the unusual details and cuts of his ready-to-wear. The author created the suit at far left from a 1990 pattern but took cues for fabrics and textures from Miyake's retail garments, like the pleated jacket from the 1991 plantation line. (Photo by Yvonne Taylor)*

Designs that stand alone

Miyake produces a high-priced, ready-to-wear collection for women, Issey Miyake Boutique; a less expensive collection called Plantation; collections for men; and a coat collection labeled Windcoat. He recently created the Permanente collection, a concept that has no precedent in the fashion business, which showcases his best vintage designs and favorites from previous collections.

The quality of Issey Miyake ready-to-wear is that of fine handsewn clothing without the pretense of couture. Everything is finished beautifully inside and out, but has an easy feel. In Miyake's ready-to-wear, seams and edges are always finished. French seams, flat-fell seams, turned-and-stitched seams, bound seams, and topstitching are all used to maximum effect. Serging is discreet, subtle, and usually narrow.

There are several themes that recur in Miyake's ready-to-wear lines as well as in his Vogue patterns. Many of the designs start as rectilinear shapes that Miyake drapes on the body, and although the garments are often oversized, they reveal the human form. These designs magically adjust to fat or skinny bodies.

Miyake is fond of pleats and folds as design elements in their own right, but he also uses them unpredictably to mold and shape rectangular shapes. Asymmetrical design elements abound, which means sewers must lay out pattern pieces carefully and cut them singly. Overlaid pieces and origami (the art of Japanese paper folding) influences are other trademarks.

Similar neckline and cowl variations occur again and again. Miyake likes to cut the collars and lapels of shirts, jackets, and coats as part of the garment's front, as he did for the jackets at left. This cut often requires skill at insetting square pieces of fabric, which I'll discuss in a bit.

Pockets and their placement are always considered carefully and are integrated with the overall design. Mitered corners are frequently used both as a design element and to reduce bulk. Closures may be unconventional and are sometimes reminiscent of kimono ties. Miyake's patterns have called for closures such as drawstrings threaded through buttonholes, hand lacing and braided ties.

Fabric first

Miyake firmly believes that design begins with fabric. He works with cloth the way a sculptor works with clay. He smells it, squeezes it, carefully examines both sides and creates his designs by wrapping and draping, referring to this process as "manual labor." He has used quilted cottons; basket-woven straw; ikats; and Japanese tie-dyed, puckered, and paper cloth. He has used fabric he describes as "whisker" linen, "downy hair," and "dobby" double-weave linen. Like Chanel, early in his career he took a wool jersey and turned it into outerwear. Miyake has even made garments with rubber, plastic, metal, bamboo, and stones.

Miyake loves stripes and has spent years researching and designing striped fabrics. A favorite fabric of his has textured stripes on one side and a solid color on the other. Any fabric that is double-faced seems to intrigue Miyake, and it turns up again and again in his ready-to-wear.

Miyake works with some of the world's finest textile designers, weavers, and craftspeople, and together they develop new textile designs from images of daily life and from the surrounding environment. He has been said to be just as interested in a weaver's "mistakes" because he finds them inspiring.

If Issey Miyake has some of the finest textiles in the world at his disposal, what are the options for home sewers? Bear in mind that Miyake usually selects natural colors. Also note that although textured and handwoven fabrics are associated with his designs, they are usually limited to simple shapes and serve as focal points within an ensemble: scarves, coats, vests, jackets. Basic garments such as skirts, tops, and pants are often constructed of simple wool jersey, wool and rayon crepe, cotton or linen. So combine textured pieces with plain weaves.

Handwoven and unusual fabrics (see Supplies on p. 28 of *Threads* issue no. 35) are perfect for many Miyake designs. You can also try creating your own puckered fabric by spinning and weaving (see "Make Your Own High-fashion Fabric" on pp. 38 and 39 of *Threads* issue no. 35) or by experimenting with commercially available wools, wool blends, and natural/synthetic blends. Try this technique, which artists call "stressing" the fabric. Test an eighth-yard first. Put the fabric in hot water—this can felt it—then immerse it in cold water, which might alter it again. You might try throwing the sample into the washing machine and agitating it, then see what effect machine drying gives. Blends of natural and synthetic fibers may react differently—one may shrink and the other may not.

Every season Miyake comes out with a line of white shirts in fine cotton, linen or silk. Make any Miyake blouse pattern in your best white fabric, and you'll have the garment for the rest of your life.

Fitting: start of the puzzle

Even though Miyake's designs are proportioned to look good on all types of figures, I strongly suggest that you fit and pretest the pattern and sewing techniques. The more loosely fitted the garment, the easier it will be to fit. As fashion and styles have

moved closer to the body, so have some of Miyake's patterns, and these fitted or semi-fitted garments require some preliminary fitting work.

Miyake's pattern pieces often look like no others and may be confusing at first. (look at the blouse cut in the sketch below to see what I mean). Even if you are accomplished at sewing and fitting, start by examining the pattern pieces and reading the directions *completely* before you begin the fitting process.

Pin fitting is a must—it shows what the garment looks like and will give you an idea of how it is assembled, as well as how it will fit and which alternations are necessary. Pin fitting is the next best thing to trying on the actual garment, and while it takes a bit of practice to go at it with confidence, it is a practical and painless fitting tool. It works best on tops, blouses, jackets, and coats; it is difficult (but not impossible) for pants and some skirts.

It may take you some time to get accustomed to "seeing" the garment during pin fitting. You must be careful when trying a pin-fit garment on so it hangs properly.

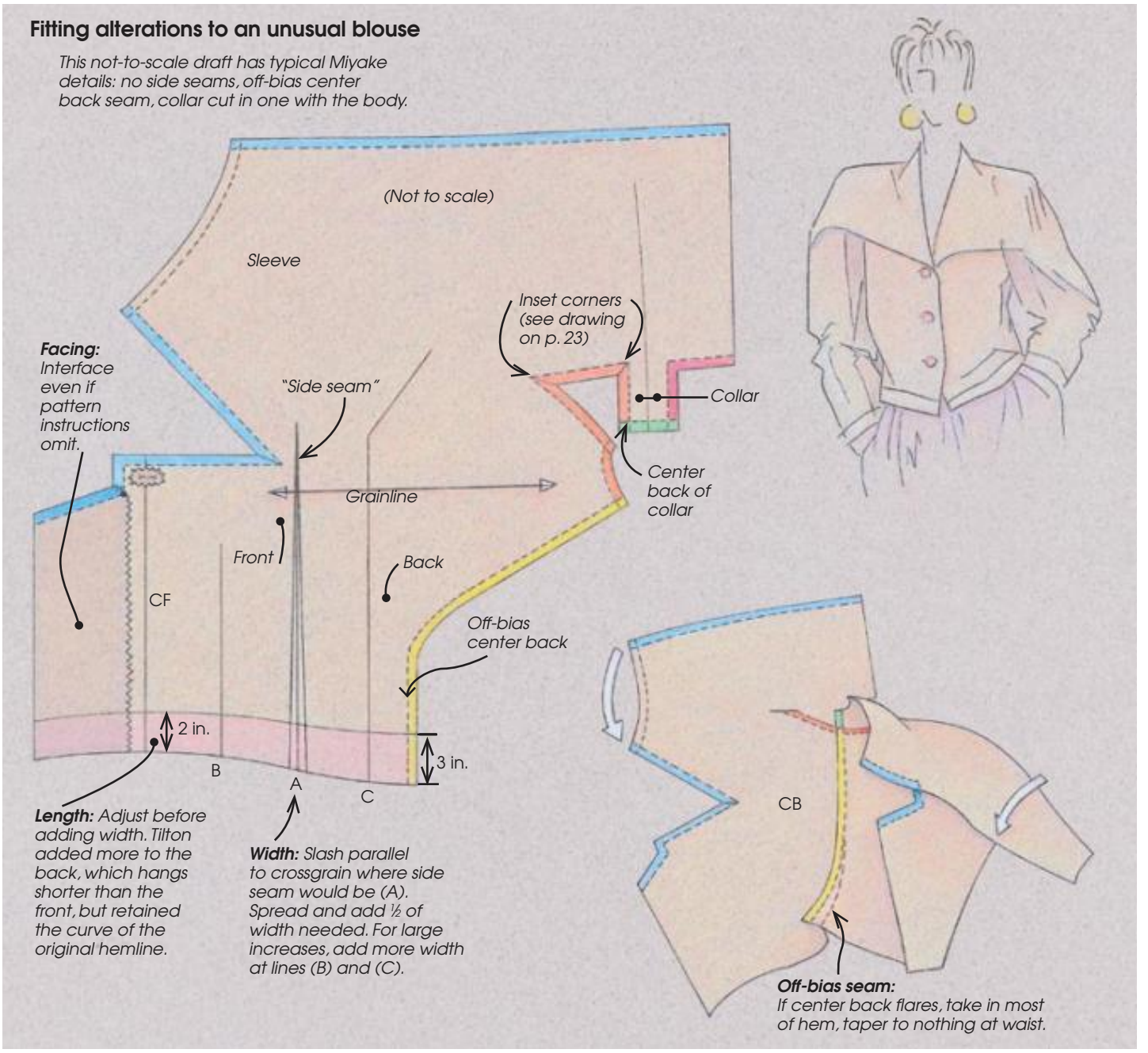
To pin fit, pull out the main pattern pieces—front, back, sleeve. Pin the body pieces together with pins parallel to and right on the seamlines and with the seam allowances on the outside. Try the sleeve on separately. Look at the overall proportions, length, pocket placement, seam and detail placement. The fact that these patterns seem to be oversized may be misleading; often the "extra" fabric is taken up in a design detail, like a pleat, or is simply necessary for the right effect, so be careful not to confuse fitting ease with design ease.

Alterations

If you are accustomed to making particular alterations to all Vogue patterns, do them before pin fitting, if possible. Do any length alterations first, then width alterations. Always make your changes following the grainlines. Since many of Miyake's designs are based on rectangles, you can often easily add or subtract length or width parallel to the sides.

Fitting alterations to an unusual blouse

This not-to-scale draft has typical Miyake details: no side seams, off-bias center back seam, collar cut in one with the body.


(Not to scale)
Sleeve
Inset corners (see drawing on p. 23)
Facing: Interface even if pattern instructions omit.
"Side seam"
Collar
Center back of collar
Grainline
Front
Back
CF
Off-bias center back
2 in.
3 in.
B
A
C
Length: Adjust before adding width. Tilton added more to the back, which hangs shorter than the front, but retained the curve of the original hemline.
Width: Slash parallel to crossgrain where side seam would be (A). Spread and add ½ of width needed. For large increases, add more width at lines (B) and (C).
CB
Off-bias seam: If center back flares, take in most of hem, taper to nothing at waist.

No side seams—Some Miyake patterns have no side seams. So if you need to widen or narrow the garment, you have to draw in a side seam, slash along the seam, and spread the pattern, using the grainline as a guide. I've shown how I modified a blouse pattern in the left drawing on the facing page.

Bias seams—Miyake sometimes designs garments that place the center back seam on an off-bias. I've seen this characteristics in dresses, jackets and shirts. Miyake and his staff usually work by draping fabric on a mannequin, and they work out the stretch and slight distortion that occurs along a bias seam in the sample fabric; you may have to adjust the bias seam as you work in your fabric. I have found that garments with such a seam tend to become too wide, and that the center back seam sometimes requires taking in, starting with the greatest amount at the hem and tapering to nothing just above the waist (see the lower right drawing opposite). The amount of extra is determined by your fabric; it is not a pattern "problem," but a matter of fine-tuning the fit. It is helpful to be aware of this before finishing the hem.

Circular skirts—Circle skirts are another favorite Miyake theme, but his versions at first glance may not even resemble a "normal" version of a circle skirt (see the center drawings on p. 22). Altering these styles should be done at the waist, rather than by splitting the pattern, so you retrain the skirt's design proportions.

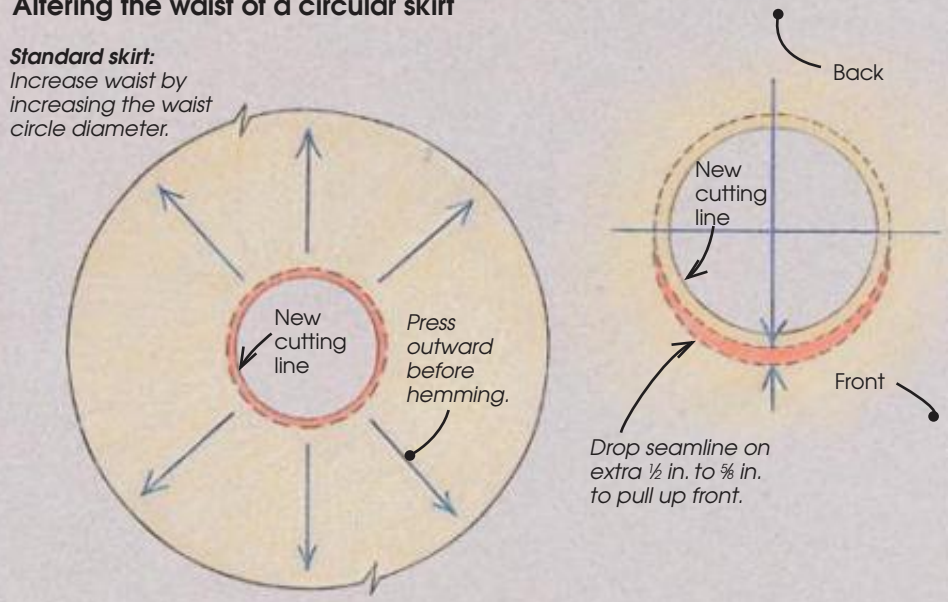
Fold and pin the skirt pieces together so the pattern resembles the final skirt, and compare the measurement of your waist with that of the pattern, so you retain the skirt's design proportions.

Fold and pin the skirt pieces together so the pattern resembles the final skirt, and compare the measurement of your waist with that of the pattern. Lay the measuring tape on its side, and measure directly on the seamline, omitting darts, tucks, and pleats. The skirt waist should measure 1½ inch to 2½ inches larger than your waist, less for slim figures, more for full figures. If you deepen the seamline 1 inch or more, you also may want to add to the skirt length and reposition markings.

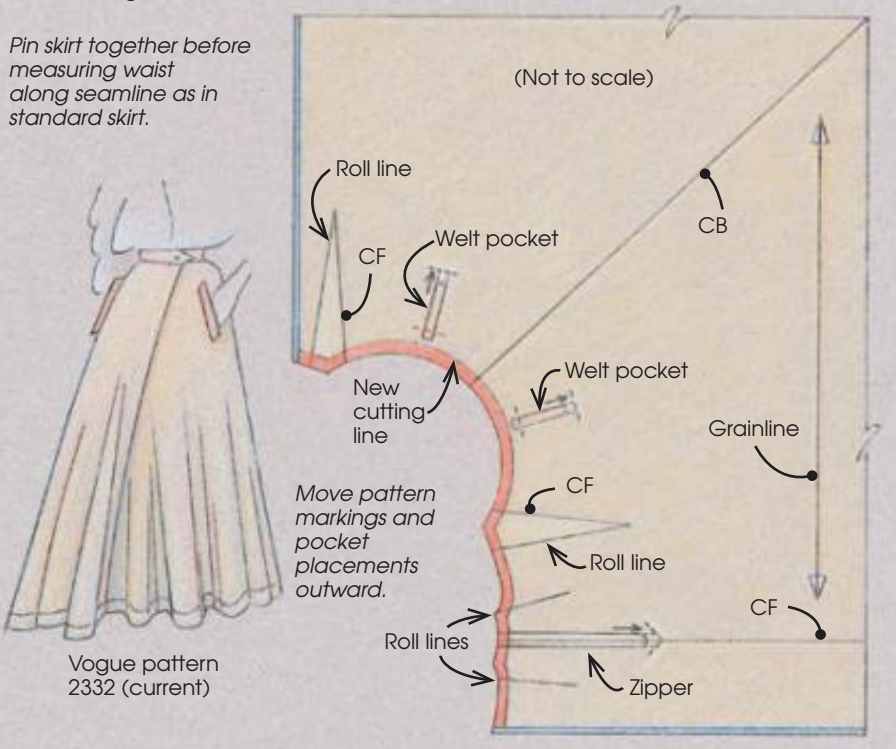
It takes surprisingly little widening to increase the waist a lot. Begin by redrawing the waistline diameter ¼ inch larger into the skirt body and remeasure the seamline. If you need to add more, keep widening the waist by ¼-inch increments.

Miyake's clever use of folds is apparent in two eye-catching suits. At near right is a wool crepe version of Vogue pattern 2428, made by author Marcy Tilton. The jacket of double-faced linen at far right, from the Spring/Summer '91 Plantation line, has carefully mitered edges and flat-fell seams. (Photo by Yvonne Taylor).

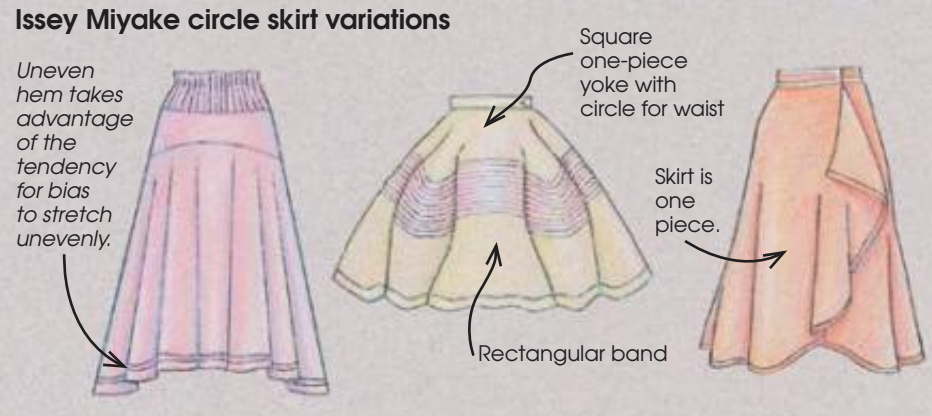
Altering the waist of a circular skirt


Standard skirt:
Increase waist by increasing the waist circle diameter.
New cutting line
Press outward before hemming.
Back
New cutting line
Front
Drop seamline on extra ½ in. to ⅝ in. to pull up front.

A rectangular shape with a circular skirt waist



Issey Miyake circle skirt variations


Uneven hem takes advantage of the tendency for bias to stretch unevenly.
Square one-piece yoke with circle for waist
Skirt is one piece.
Rectangular band

Don't forget to alter the waistband. The finished waistband, not including overlap for the closure, is usually 1 to 1½ inches smaller than the skirt waist measurement, allowing ¼ to ½ inch of the skirt to ease onto each quarter of the waistband.

Circle skirts tend to droop at the center front. To eliminate this, trim an additional ½ to ¾ inch from the front, tapering to nothing at the side seams (see nearest top drawing at left). This is most accurately done while checking the fit of the waistband; machine or hand baste the waistband in place and adjust as needed.

Because a circle skirt encompasses all possibilities of grain and bias, it has a tendency to stretch unevenly, which makes the hem crooked. This happens especially with rayons and loose or unbalanced weaves. Allowing the skirt to hang for 24 hours before hemming, as is sometimes advised, is usually inadequate; subsequent stretching may still occur. To assure an even hem on patterns that call for it, take the stretch out before you sew any seams or finish the hem. I work at the ironing board, pressing and stretching the fabric gently outward from waist to hem, holding the skirt firmly at the waist. The results may be an uneven-looking skirt edge, but you can adjust the hem at the end of constructing using a hem marker.

Miyake is well aware of the tendency for a circle skirt to stretch and even takes advantage of it by designing skirts with hems that are deliberately uneven. The stretch adds to the asymmetrical nature of the skirt in a now out-of-print Vogue pattern (see bottom left fashion sketch on the facing page). This

Inside out: *All edges in Issey Miyake ready-to-wear are carefully finished, as in this Spring/Summer '91 Plantation twill linen suit jacket. The armhole and side seam edges were bound with bias tape.*

is a marvelous skirt and is great worn sideways, with the side seams down center front and back!

Construction tips

Issey Miyake uses the sewing purist's favorite basic methods for ensuring that the inside of the garment is in keeping with the design, fabric, and integrity of the garment, yet is never overworked or fussy. When sewing Miyake patterns, be prepared to take your time and enjoy the process of fine-tuning your skills, doing beautiful work, and yes, even fussing, and you will enjoy the surprises as you sew, fit, and finally try the garment on. Pretest techniques, seam finishes, topstitching, and stitch length.

I hand baste with abandon, using silk thread so the basting marks will not remain in the fabric, even if I press or stitch over them. Hand sewing the details is a more appropriate choice than machine topstitching for some fabrics. The look of handwovens is preserved by hand stitching the turned-under edges so that they are hidden on the inside, rather than by machine topstitching through all layers as the pattern often recommends. Hand stitching keeps the look of the edges of a silk crepe de chine blouse soft and fluid.

Make certain to transfer all markings from the pattern to fabric. I recommend using tailor's tacks in different thread colors to match and identify markings easily (see *Threads* issue no. 35, pp. 18 and 20).

Always interface areas for buttons and buttonholes. There must always be three layers behind a button or buttonhole; the patterns sometimes omit this detail. If the buttonholes are placed on the bias, cut the interfacing and place its grain *parallel* to the buttonhole.

The pattern instructions often say to turn edges that meet at a corner twice and stitch them, rather than finish the corner with a miter, which is what I have seen on Miyake's ready-to-wear. It is worthwhile to master mitered corners (see Basics) both by machine and by hand. Machine-stitched miters are sharp and crisp; handstitched miters are soft and flowing. The nature of the fabric dictates which works best. When in doubt, make a test sample.

Two common seam finishes in Miyake's ready-to-wear line are French and flat-fell. Even experienced sewers will appreciate the more efficient and foolproof way to do a flat-fell seam shown in *Threads* issue no. 35, p. 54; a great way to do a French seam is shown in *Basics*.

A French seam is perfect for straight or slightly curved seams at he shoulder, side, or for a sleeve on a dropped-shoulder garment; but for a stand set-in sleeve, a French seam is simply impossible to do well and it is inappropriate. Miyake usually solves this set-in sleeve dilemma by binding the sleeve's seam allowances with bias (see photo on facing page), or by finishing edges with serging.

Flat-fell seams work best when the seam allowances are cut a bit wider than the pattern's standard ⅝ inch Again, experiment; I prefer to start with ¾- to ⅞-inch-wide seam allowances, which are called for in some Miyake patterns.

Issey Miyake uses the inset corner technique, perhaps more than any other, to set in his signature cut-with-the front cowl necklines and collars on blouses, jackets, dresses, and coats. (The facing of the jacket on the front cover also has an inset corner.) The pattern directions are not always clear, nor are they necessarily correct on this point. Patterns often have smaller-than-90° angles, which are the trickiest to sew. Careful marking, stitching, and clipping are the secrets to successful inset corners (see the drawing sequence below). Natural fibers are by far the easiest to sew and the most forgiving of the small inaccuracies.

Carefully mark the seamlines using a fine chalker like a Chalkoner or thread tracing. Reinforce the inside corner seamline with slightly shorter-than-normal machine stitches and clip corner.

Pin the pieces together carefully, distributing or dividing any fullness evenly on either side of the corner pin.

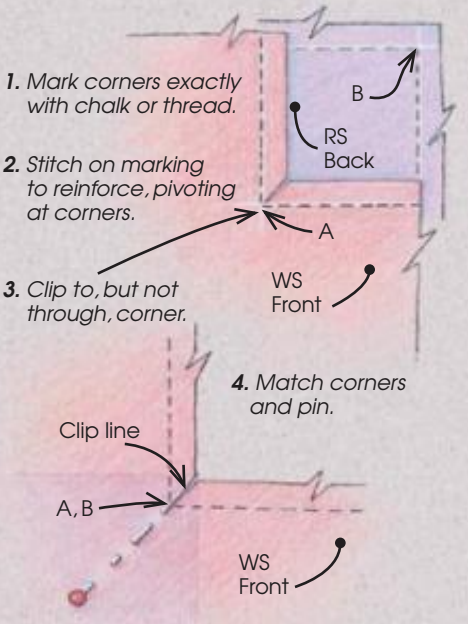
Stitch the first side of the corner right up to the corner. Leave the needle down, lift the presser foot, pivot, and adjust the fullness of the fabric. Lower the presser foot and stitch the second side. ❑

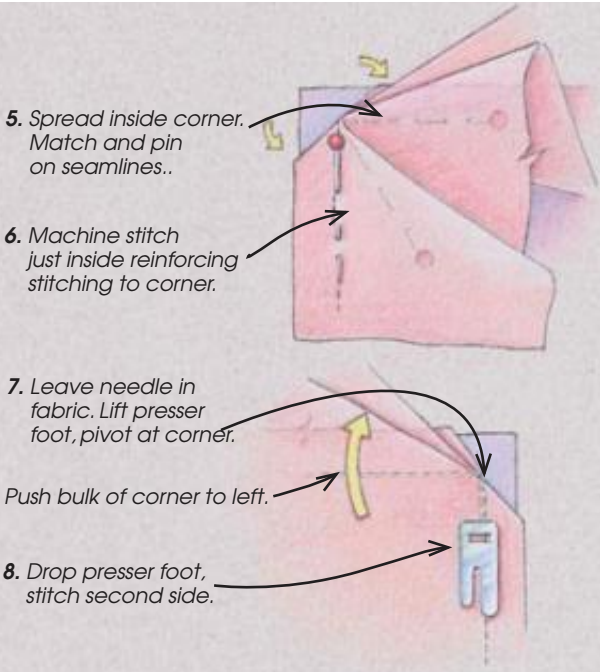
Marcy Tilton is the owner of the Sewing Workshop in San Francisco, CA, and a national sewing lecturer and instructor. For a class schedule, visit TheSewingWorkshop.com, or call (415) 221-SEWS. For an enlightening look at Miyake's designs form the 1980s, see Issey Miyake: Photographs by Irving Penn *(Little, Brown and Company/Callaway Editions, 200 West Street, Waltham, MA 02254; 1988; 96 pp; 46 photos), a captivating collection of color and B&W photographs.*

Insetting square or sharp angles

Miyake patterns often have a collar cut as part of the front, which requires a square or angled inset corner.

Vogue 2332 (current)




5. Spread inside corner. Match and pin on seamlines..
6. Machine stitch just inside reinforcing stitching to corner.
7. Leave needle in fabric. Lift presser foot, pivot at corner.
Push bulk of corner to left.
8. Drop presser foot, stitch second side.

Elegant restraint, original and copy: ***Armani's original (below, with detail) inspired the author's hidden-placket version at right, adapted from Neue Mode 22327.*** *For a pattern similar to the original, try The Sewing Workshop's Firenze Jacket (800-466-1599).*

Armani Jacket: Finishing Details

Add Armani-worthy linings, hidden plackets, bound edges, and other details to complete your jacket projects

BY MARCY TILTON

(from issue #84)

As I've explored original Armani jackets for tailoring insights over the years, I've not been blind to all the little details that make a designer original particularly desirable. Even though the Armani aesthetic is relentlessly "less is more," there's no shortage of classic features from his exquisite jackets that are just as collectible and copyable as his more obvious cut and construction trademarks, which I looked at in the first two of my articles on do-it-yourself Armani jackets (*Threads* No. 82, pp. 30-35 and No. 83, pp. 40-45). In this final installment of my series, I'll cover linings and hidden-placket closures, as in the jacket at left, as well as construction details on binding and bias inserts and a few assorted details for buttons and buttonholes.

Make a new lining pattern

I find it faster and more accurate to trace off a new lining pattern from my altered jacket pattern pieces, rather than alter the lining pieces, especially if I've made many of the pattern tweaks described in detail in my first Armani article. The process I use to make a basic jacket lining is shown on p. 26. You'll also see how I adapted the process to make the lining pattern for the bias-bound collarless jacket at left, which has facings at each hem. If you prefer, make the same alterations to your lining pattern that you made on your jacket.

I suggest you add a deep back pleat to reduce strain across the back, no matter which process you choose. Armani's technique for machine-stitching this seam is clever and quick.

To insert the lining, use whatever technique you prefer. Armani's linings are bagged in entirely by machine. To insert the lining in my version of his bias-bound jacket, I completed two garment shells: one was the outer jacket, without facings, the other was the lining with front and hem facings attached. I pinned and basted these together before binding the perimeter.

My favorite all-purpose lining fabric is rayon Bemberg, sold in fabric stores under the name Ambiance. It comes in a wide range of colors, it's inexpensive, and it feels great in cold or warm weather. Armani sometimes uses a silk/rayon blend in his most expensive jackets, but I've never been able to find a source for it. I like to use silk crepe de Chine for my most deluxe Armani-type jackets. It feels wonderful, and it's compatible in drape and weight to the most featherweight outer fabrics. Don't use china silk; it's too fragile and doesn't wear well.

While you're working on the lining pattern, consider adding an inner pocket and button flap to the left-hand side of the jacket, as shown in the detail photo of an Armani original on p. 26 and the top right drawings on p. 27. It's a simple way to add function and polish to any jacket lining. And try my strategy of making the entire lining

Model photo: Jack Deutsch; hair and makeup: Maria Seccia; mannequin photo: Judi Rutz

MAKE A LINING PATTERN FROM THE JACKET PATTERN

If you've made a lot of alterations to your garment pattern, it's often easier to copy it for the lining pattern instead of altering the lining, too. You'll need all the sleeve and body pieces, plus all facings, and some large sheets of pattern tracing paper.

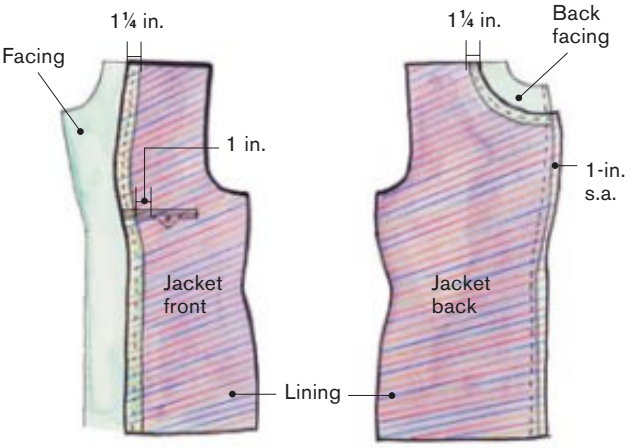
For a standard jacket

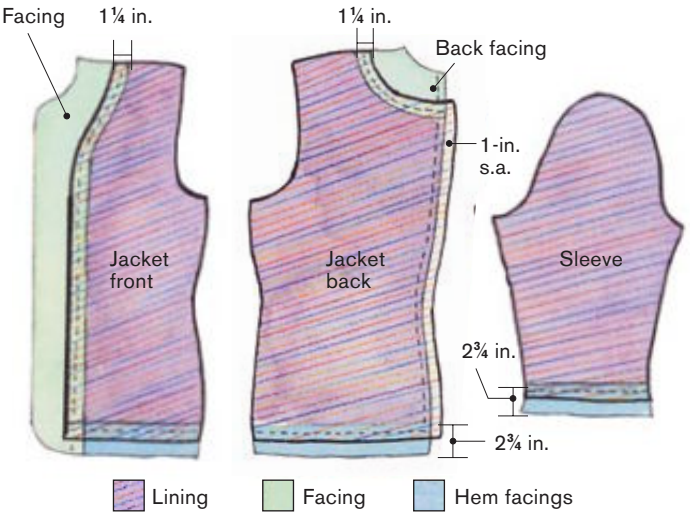
Use the sleeve pattern as is for the sleeve lining.

Step 1. Overlay facings on front and back pattern pieces, then cover with tracing paper.

Step 2. Trace unfaced edges of patterns; then make line 1¼ in. inside each facing/lining edge, following facing's edge shape. At CB, allow 1-in. seam allowances (s.a.s).

Step 3. Mark corresponding notches on lining and front facing to simplify alignment, and draw in pocket opening if desired.





For a bias-bound jacket

Step 1. Create 2¾-in.-deep hem facing pieces for the garment and sleeve, as shown above.

Step 2. Position all facing pieces over jacket front, back, and sleeve pieces. Then overlay with tracing paper, and proceed with Steps 2 and 3 of process for standard jacket lining.

Step 3. When attaching facings to lining (see text on p. 41 for more detail on lining bias-bound jackets), stitch hem facings to lining first, using ¼-in. s.a.s, even though you've drafted ⅝-in. s.a.s. The added ease will allow lining to hang without pulling on jacket.

An inner, chest-level pocket, inserted in the lining only, is an easy-to-add touch of class. *Armani's inside pockets include a simple triangular button-flap within the lips of a standard double-welt pocket opening.*

layer at the start of the jacket project when your energy and enthusiasm are high. It's lovely to complete the outer shell and find a finished lining just waiting for you.

Add a hidden placket

A concealed front button closure is a classic Armani detail that's been showing up in his line for years on all kinds of jackets, with or without collars or lapels. It's a great look, it covers up not-quite-perfect buttons or buttonholes, and it's easy to do, especially if you're willing to make a sample in which you can experiment with the length, width, and stitching style that's perfect for your project. Step-by-step patternmaking and construction details are provided on p. 28.

In all cases, the placket opening starts 1 in. below the roll line, neck edge, or V-neck edge. This keeps the placket flat and hidden whether open or closed. The placket length can be varied, but usually it accommodates three or more buttons. Use your pattern's button spacing as a guide. On the button side, consider adopting Armani's habit of underlaying his buttons with a matching strip of grosgrain ribbon, as shown in the detail photo on p. 24, for a bit of instant panache and some extra stability.

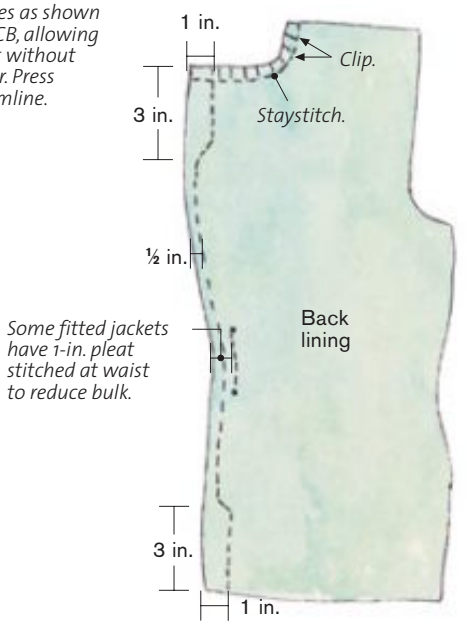
Options for visible buttons

Many an Armani jacket has earned its place in the jacket Hall of Fame

Photos except where noted: David Page Coffin; drawings: author

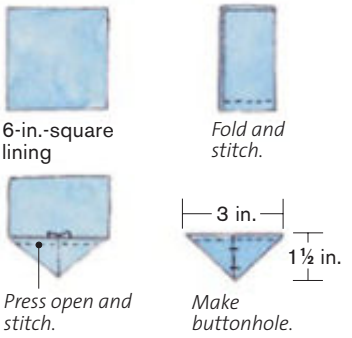
A PLEAT AT LINING'S CENTER BACK PROVIDES EASE

Join lining back pieces as shown to create a pleat at CB, allowing ease and movement without straining jacket layer. Press open along 1-in. seamline.

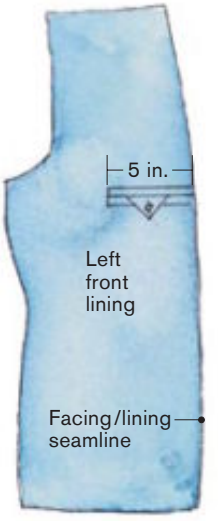


MAKE INNER LINING POCKET WITH FLAP

Step 1. Make buttonhole flap.



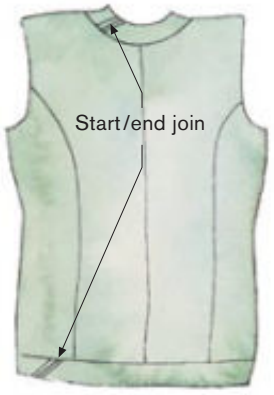
Step 2. Make 5-in.-wide double-welt pocket in front left lining only. Allow facing/lining seamline to form facing end of pocket mouth (don't catch pocket bag in seam). Then catch flap between lips before closing top of pocket.



BINDING TIPS FOR BIAS-BOUND JACKETS

Prestretch bias strips

Cut bias 3 in. wide, and press gently to remove stretch. Re-mark and trim to finished width.

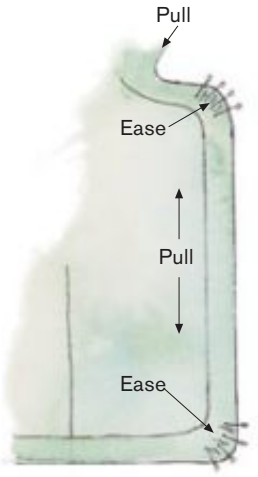


Start and join in back

Start pinning bias at back neck, as explained below, and use strip long enough to reach jacket hem in back.

Ease bias at corners, stretch on straight edges

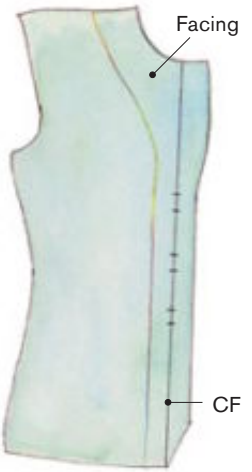
As you pin bias in place at back neck, pull slightly on it, so edge will cup to inside. Pin in as much ease as possible at curves to allow bias to stretch over them.



IN-SEAM BUTTONHOLES

Step 1. Mark buttonhole openings parallel to CF on front, and transfer to facing. Cut pattern front and facing at CF; then add ⅜-in. s.a.s to both sides.

Step 2. Stitch front and facing pieces together at CFs, skipping over and backstitching at each buttonhole. Press seams open, join fronts to facings, and secure buttonhole lips with hand stitches.



Design options

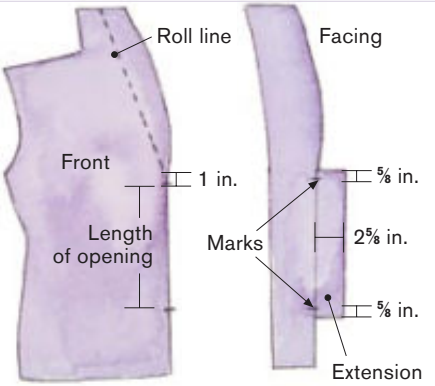
In-seam pockets | Contrast front edges

CREATE A HIDDEN-PLACKET FRONT CLOSURE

Pattern changes

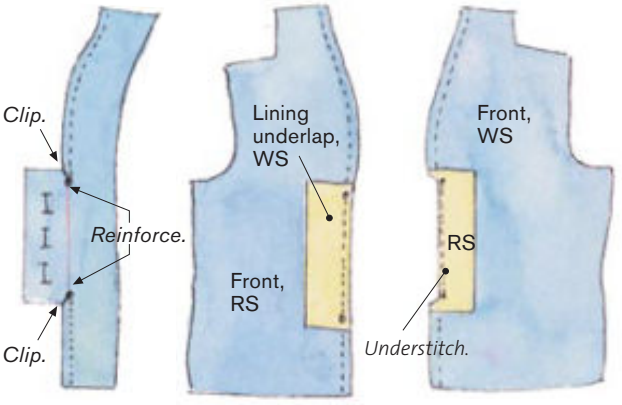
Step 1. On front piece, mark point at least 1-in. below neck edge or roll line. Mark length of opening below this point on front seamline. Then transfer marks from front to facing pattern.

Step 2. Draw 2⅝-in.-wide facing extension at seamline between marks on facing; lengthen extension by ⅝ in. at each end. It's easiest to cut both facings with extension, and then remove left extension.

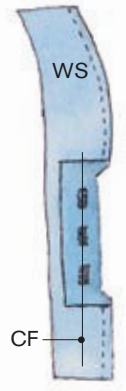


Construction

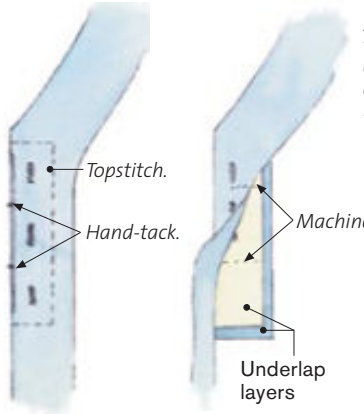
Step 1. Interface both left and right facings, and trim away left extension. Cut front lining underlap with same dimensions as extension, and interface with knit fusible. Then pin underlap RSs together to front. Stitch between marks, clip to marks, grade seams, and turn to WS, then understitch.



Step 2. On facing, reinforce both opening marks; then clip diagonally to marks. Press extension to WS between dots. Mark and make buttonholes on CF line on extension.



Step 3. RSs together, matching marks, stitch front to facing on either side of opening, backstitching at marks. Turn and press, positioning facing/placket out of sight. Pin to hold in position.



Step 4. Lift facing and stitch between buttonholes through both underlap layers as far as possible toward outer edge. Press, topstitch around opening (see drawings below for options), then hand-tack at edge between buttonholes.

Topstitching options

adorned with nothing more than perfectly matching, two- or four-hole, raised-edge, menswear buttons and machine-made keyhole buttonholes. This is not a designer who believes in using buttons as jewelry. If you decide to go this route, and live near a major city, I suggest you seek out a tailor who can whip off professional-looking machined buttonholes for you, for a nominal fee. If this is not an option, don't feel you have to invest in a keyhole-button-capable machine, or even use this setting to get professional results. Less is more, remember, and you're better off with well-made, ordinary shirt-style buttonholes than with not-quite-perfect keyholes, provided you don't attach the buttons with thread shanks that are too thick.

Another lovely and classic Armani approach to buttonholes is to replace sewn buttonholes with inseam ones. Because this means adding a seam at center front, as shown on p. 27, you'll have the interesting option of using a contrasting fabric at the front edges, as Armani sometimes does. Otherwise, of course, you only need to add the extra seam on the buttonhole overlap side of the jacket front.

But notice in the design sketches at bottom right on p. 27, drawn from my collection of favorite Armani ideas, that the designer has picked up the theme of vertical seams and placed his front pockets in-seam, too. It's yet another example of his on-going strategy of trying every possible combination of a few good detail ideas on a handful of classic garment silhouettes, while always insisting on elegance, appropriateness, and simplicity. A pretty good formula for us at-home designers, too, don't you think? ♦

Marcy Tilton writes, sews, and designs in Takilma, Ore.

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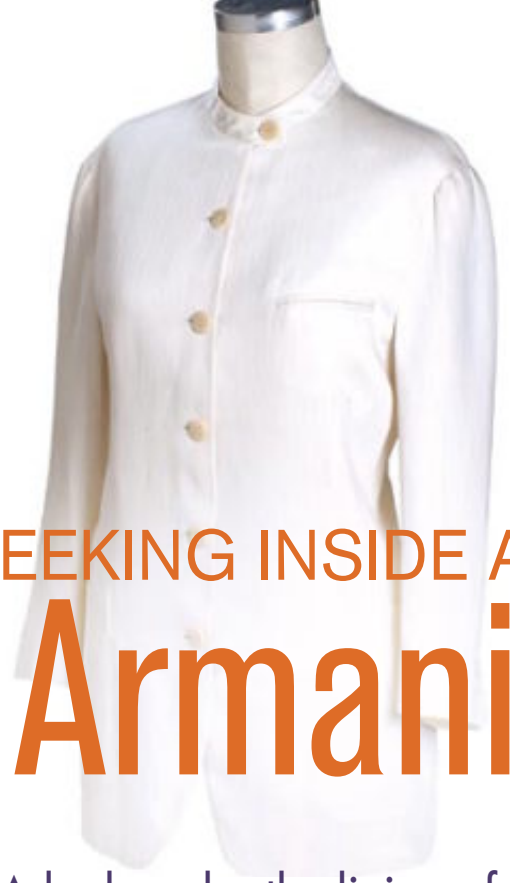


PEEKING INSIDE AN Armani

A look under the lining of a round-neck jacket reveals interesting tricks that support its neckline and shoulders

by Louise Cutting
(from issue #105)

Finding a previously owned Armani jacket in a consignment store is not so unusual, but this one came with an offer I couldn't refuse: free to a good home! I could understand why it hadn't sold; it was a bit wide in the shoulders for the current look. But I was interested in making a similar jacket, with a round neck and without lapels, so I didn't hesitate. As soon as I got it home, I unpicked the partial lining and began to poke around inside. What I discovered was a very clever way to quickly and simply shape and support the shoulder and neckline of any soft, lightweight jacket with a round neckline and no lapels. As you can see in the accompanying photos and drawings, the key is a pieced chest shield, with one portion cut on the straight grain and another cut on the bias, to provide appropriate support to each part of the garment the shield touches.

What's a chest shield?

A chest shield is a multi- or single-layered structure of interfacing that tailors use to help maintain the shape of the upper front of a jacket, filling in the hollow that sometimes occurs above the bust. The neck area always has a tendency to stretch when a garment is worn, and the chest shield can help here, too. The shield is cut and pieced in such a way that its neckline edge is virtually on the straight grain (see the drawings at right), so it stabilizes the neckline without the added bulk of stay tapes used in conventional tailoring. At the same time, the bias-cut section along the center front provides a bit of give to the shield across the upper chest. I recommend cutting a chest shield from a sturdy, woven, sew-in interfacing such as Form Flex woven or Armo Press firm (both made by HTC, available in most fabric stores, or go to www.htc-inc.net).

The rest of the jacket front, and other areas, such as the sleeve cap and back, can be interfaced as well, or not. If you choose to interface these areas, do so in the usual way, before you assemble the jacket and attach the chest shield. In the top photo on p. 31 you'll see how I usually interface a jacket, in addition to using a chest shield.

Attaching the chest shield

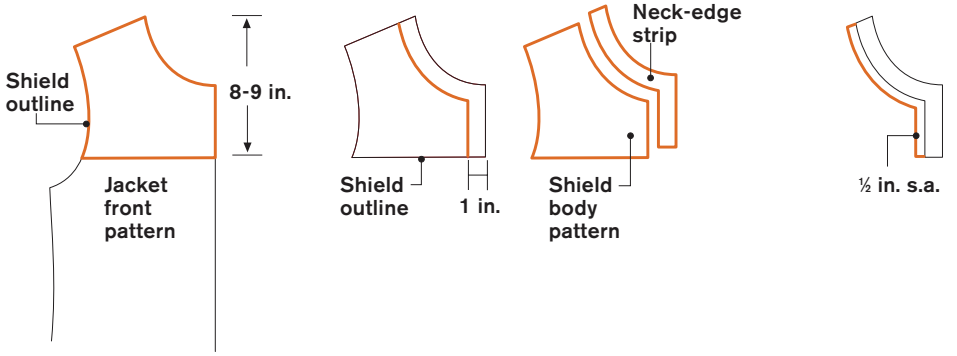
The trick to attaching the shield in the Armani fashion is to machine-

MAKING A PIECED CHEST SHIELD

1. Trace the front shoulder area from your jacket pattern to make the shield pattern.

2. On the shield tracing, draw a line parallel to and 1 inch from the neckline and CF edges. Cut the tracing apart on this line to create the shield body pattern and the neck-edge strip.

3. Retrace the neck-edge strip, adding ½ inch seam allowance as shown, to make the neck-edge pattern.



Drawings: Karen Meyer; bottom photo on p. 47: Scott Phillips; all other photos: Sloan Howard

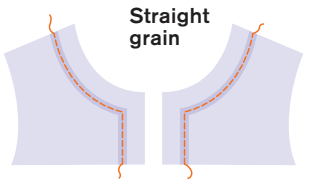
Round-neck jackets need different treatment in the shoulders than jackets with lapels. This example, made from Kwik Sew pattern 2670, shown inside out before attaching the facings or lining, demonstrates what the author learned from examining a similar Armani ready-to-wear jacket.

Shield is caught to the sleeve cap seam allowance with hand stitches
Neck-edge strip of the shield is cut on the bias
Chest shield body is cut on the straight grain
Jacket body and sleeve cap are interfaced with fusible interfacing
Shoulder pads are hand-sewn to the top edge of the shield
Shield is not joined to the jacket at the shoulder seam
Armhole seam allowance is clipped and pressed open at the top of the sleeve

sew it only to the seam allowances of the neckline and center front, after the jacket fronts and back (interfaced if desired) have been joined at the shoulders and the shoulder seam is pressed open. The neckline and center front seamlines of the shield will again be caught when the front facing and any collar are attached to the jacket front. And after the sleeve is attached, you should hand-sew the armhole edge of the shield to the jacket front armhole seam allowance. However, the shield is not attached in any way along the shoulder seam, and this allows all layers to move easily and comfortably when the jacket is worn. To finish, sew a shoulder pad along its center to each free top edge of the shield, and also to the armhole seam allowances, using hand stitches, as shown in the detail photo at right. Notice also in this photo that the armhole seam allowances have been clipped in front and back (about 4 inches from the shoulder seam), then they've been pressed open at the top of the sleeve to create the signature flat Armani sleeve cap shaping. Further details on how to construct and press the shoulders and set in the sleeves à la Armani can be found in *Threads* No. 83, pp. 40-45, available online at www.threadsmagazine.com. ♦

Louise Cutting owns Fabric Collections, and is a pattern designer in Winter Park, Fla.

4. Cut two pieces of interfacing from each pattern piece, cutting the neck-edge strip with the CF on the bias, and the shield body with the front edge on the straight grain. Overlap each neck-edge strip on a body piece by ½ inch, and topstitch together.



Interfacing tricks borrowed from a master tailor give the author's jacket the same soft support found in the original.

Techniques of Haute Couture

Designer Charles Kleibacker teaches fundamentals, from fabric to finish

by Elizabeth A. Rhodes (from issue #6)

haute couture, which means "high sewing," is exactly what designer Charles Kleibacker teaches. When we began working together five years ago, he stressed, "A beautiful garment is forever. The design idea and its careful, dedicated construction go hand in hand to bring a fine garment to reality. Design is engineering … fitting on human anatomy … to bring a garment to the comfortable perfection of couture. The designer-engineer researches fabric; he or she understands the value of a good iron and, early on, realizes that a designer's work is ninety-nine percent sweat and one percent glamour."

The following sampling of Kleibacker's couture techniques are not for everyday dresses. They're for the special occasions when you really want high sewing.

Fabric

Fit is the real secret of couture, and fabric is the starting point for achieving it. That's why Kleibacker advises, "Explore your fabric!" Always start with the best quality. His preference is for natural-fiber fabrics that can be molded.

Consider the fiber quality and the yarn and fabric construction. The length, diameter, and regularity of fibers vary with the weather, the animal's diet, or the soil in which the plant grows. Consult a good textile book for details on the qualities to look for in various fibers (see "Resources," page 37). Yarn is a group of fibers twisted together. The greater the twist, the stronger, duller in luster, and more costly the yarn. To determine the amount of twist, count the revolutions in an inch. Evaluate the yarn construction with the purpose of the garment in mind. Often drapability may be sacrificed for strength or durability.

Fabric is a combination of yarns interlaced at right angles (wovens), interlooped (knits), or intermeshed (nonwovens). Check the woven fabric's construction for flaws—is the grain straight and the thread count consistent?—and consider the amount of fiber and yarn packed into an inch of fabric. Again, decide what will work best for the intended design. Kleibacker recommends using a "gutsy" fabric—one with sufficient fiber to make a statement.

Explore the fabric's personality. Pull on it and check its stability in horizontal, vertical, and diagonal directions. The vertical grain is made up of yarns that are placed on the loom as warp. Warp yarns must be exceptionally strong to survive the weaving process. Because they are held under tension during weaving, they're often rigid in the finished fabric. In general, warp yarns are used vertically on the body so areas that flex, such as elbows and knees, have stronger yarns in the flexing direction. Filling, or weft, yarns, which cross the warp in weaving (and make up the cross grain of the fabric), do not have to be strong, as less tension is placed on them in processing. They are often more relaxed in the finished fabric, and perhaps more drapable.

Examine the yarns and fibers in the vertical and cross grains and evaluate each. Don't be a slave to rules such as always cutting garments on the vertical grain. Check the drape, or hang, of the fabric on all grains. Where does the fabric look fullest and richest? Stitch the fabric on the cross grain, vertical grain, and bias. Look at the stitching and analyze the results. Many times Kleibacker finds fabric at its drapable and stitchable best on the cross grain, so he does bias cuts, placing the crosswise grain in the vertical direction. A further advantage to the cross grain, he points out, is that it is often more economical.

Underlining

Once you have chosen a fashion fabric, you must decide whether it can stand alone or whether it must be combined with another fabric beneath it, either for visual reasons or structural support. If the fabric needs an extra layer, Kleibacker recommends the use of an underlining rather than a lining. The underlining (cut the same size and shape as the fabric, placed back-to-back with it, and sewn as one with it) has many advantages. Dressmaker's carbon markings can be made on the underlining rather than on the face fabric; the underlining reduces imprinting from pressing; and hand stitches can be taken in the underlining only so that they won't show on the face. An underlining provides the wearer with greater privacy, especially in a case where undergarments would spoil the outer appearance. Underlining also tends to improve the drapability of a garment.

Kleibacker recommends using fashion fabric for underlining whenever possible (in other words, double fashion fabric). Decide if two thicknesses of the fabric will hang well; some fabrics are too heavy for this treatment. However, even fabrics with as much weight and body as silk linen (a medium-weight pure silk in a linenlike weave) can be treated this way with great success. For heavier wovens, silk shantung often works well. Kleibacker points out that whatever the underlining, it must be compatible with the fashion fabric: The more these two layers can act as one fabric, the better the hang of the finished garment.

To prepare all fabrics for the needle, KIeibacker suggests a heavy steam pressing on the wrong side of the fabric with an industrial iron like the Sussman, which is heavy and provides regular blasts of steam. After you've steamed and pressed all fabrics, let them dry well before proceeding.

Pattern layout

A pattern of your own design or one you use repeatedly, Kleibacker advises, should be drawn and stored on muslin without seam allowances. Experiment with the pattern pieces and fabric to determine the most economical layout. Measure the amount of fabric needed for one pattern piece, and cut two lengths, one each for the left and right sides. Place them right sides together, with the nap running in the same direction. All fabric has some nap; for compatibility of color and drape, identify the "top" of the fabric with a thread tack each time you cut the lengths for a pattern piece. If you're using an underlining, cut two lengths of that as well, and with corresponding lengths of outer fabric and interlining back to back, align the grain. The two layers will be treated as one.

With the two lengths of fabric right sides together, pin the selvages together with

This luxurious skirt gathers 12 yards of silk crepe de chine on a hip-clinging band. It's paired with a bias silk-crepe top, whose bias sash wraps the waist three times. From design to execution, it's Kleibacker's brand of haute couture. Photo courtesy of Kleibacker.

Charles Kleibacker

Kleibacker, who was literally brought up in women's ready-to-wear at his family's department store in Cullman, AL, began his career as a reporter for the *Birmingham News*. Next he wrote copy for Bernice Fitz-Gibbon at Gimbels, NY, where he extolled automobile tires and garden accessories. When a fashion copywriting job opened, Fitz-Gibbon chose him. "He was horrified. We talked him into it," Fitz-Gibbon recalled. (As a designer, Kleibacker is "right up there next to Norman Norell, maybe alongside Norell," wrote Fitz-Gibbon in her book, *Macy's, Gimbels and Me.*)

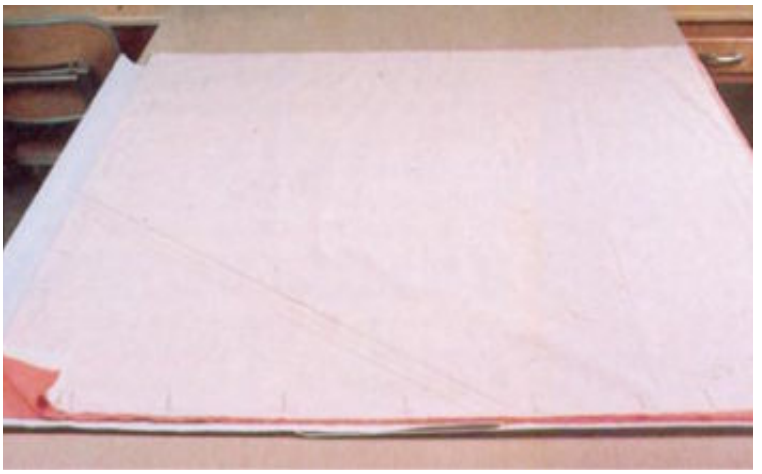
While at Gimbels, Kleibacker did graduate work in retailing at NYU. Three years later he took a job writing, advertising and promotion copy for DePinna, a Fifth Avenue specialty store.

After many visits to the house of Dior in Paris (where singer Hildegarde, his next promotion-writing charge, was a client), Kleibacker realized that women's fashion had always been his first love. Returning to New York, he and two partners opened a women's custom and, limited-edition ready-to-wear business. He eventually sold designs through Hattie Carnegie, Bergdorf Goodman, Bonwit Teller, and Neiman-Marcus to celebrities such as the late Gertrude Lawrence and Lady Iris Mountbatten.

In 1953 he closed up and went to Paris to work as a designer for Antonio Castillo in the house of Lanvin. He found this a great experience. He admires Paris designers. Alix Grès, who does "beautiful, lyrical, lilting, soft body clothes," is one of his favorites. But he says, "I feel what keeps me in business is what I have to offer as an entity… not something taken from here, there, and everywhere and not a garment watered down for production purposes." Kleibacker has also worked in Italy. He did two small collections on his own in Rome before returning to this country in 1957.

After three years of designing for Seventh Avenue's Nettie Rosenstein, he opened his own business in 1960. His designs are usually on-the-bias soft body shapes in silk. The clothes are painstakingly made, individually cut, and supervised by Kleibacker in his studio in the Hotel Park Royal on New York's West 73rd St. They sell for $950 to $2,500. Kleibacker believes in simplicity, fit, and comfort. His designs may be dramatic, but they are never flamboyant in silhouette or color.

In recent years, Kleibacker has entered the entertainment field—as lecturer/showman. With his collection of vintage clothing from the 1870s on, he narrates two fascinating programs: "Trends: Then and Now," a lighthearted fashion-history lesson, and "Designs Worn by Famous People." He also serves as designer-in-residence for the Department of Textiles and Clothing, College of Home Economics, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH. *—E. R.*



Two pieces of face-to-face fashion fabric, positioned with the same nap, are laid over large sheets of dressmaker carbon. The muslin pattern is on top, and the three layers are pinned at the selvages, ready for Rhodes to wheel the pattern markings on to the fashion fabric.

Rhodes bastes this bias seam with overlapping stitches before she cuts the fabric so she can stretch it to the maximum as she machine-stitches.

A deep V neckline often sags and gaps when a woman sits or stoops. To prevent this, Rhodes eases the excess fabric against a bias tape by pinning the bodice front closely to the tape (muslin, top). With natural fibers, up to ⅞ inch may be eased out. After easing and pressing, the neckline of the finished garment adheres to the body. White slip basting is in place for the first fitting (bottom).

the pins perpendicular to the selvage and taking up only the smallest amount of fabric. Place large sheets of dressmaker carbon (26 inches by 39 inches is best) underneath the fashion fabric, and position the muslin pattern on top, aligning the grain, Use a tracing wheel (one with teeth but not spikes, please!) to transfer all pattern markings for stitching lines to the bottom piece of fashion fabric (or to the underlining if you use one). For accuracy, push forward—if you are holding the wheel with your right hand, use the index and middle fingers of your left hand to secure the fabric in front of the wheel. Carefully remove the muslin pattern, and turn the fabric over onto more sheets of dressmaker carbon. Wheel along the carbon lines you just made to transfer the markings to the other piece of fashion fabric. Transfer all markings to the face of each fabric layer by thread-marking—baste along the carbon markings with a contrasting color thread. (If you use an underlining, align its grain with that of the face fabric before you baste through both layers.) You're now ready to cut the fabric, using about 2-inch-wide seam allowances for fitting purposes. Some seams may be stitched before cutting, as I'll explain.

Seams

Seams may be placed on the straight of grain, on garment bias (an angle other than straight or 45˚), or on true bias (45˚). The closer the angle of the seam is to true bias, the more the fabric will stretch and "drip".

When possible, hand-baste bias seams together before you cut out the garment. Use overlapping basting stitches, which will stretch with the fabric as you machine-stitch. Begin with a knot in the thread and baste about 6 inches. Then cut the thread and, without knotting the end, baste another 6 inches, overlapping the last few stitches of the preceding basting. Repeat, starting anew about every 6 inches. Then, when machine-stitching a bias seam below the bust, stretch the seam fully and stitch as far as possible before stopping the machine. This will remove all the stretch in the seam and prevent it from shifting with every wearing.

If possible, also baste the straight-grain seams before you cut them. Since there will be little stretch in them, you needn't use overlapping basting. Simply stretch the seams as you machine-stitch. The stretch will be nominal, but the seams are usually smoother if some tension is used.

A seam that can't be basted *before* the garment is cut should be slip-basted before it is permanently stitched. Slip basting is worked from the right side of the garment so that you can see the finished product. Then you turn the garment inside out and machine-stitch on top of the basting—the ultimate in accuracy! Fold one seam in on the stitching line and match it to the stitching line of the other side. Pin in place. Then slip a hand needle, threaded in a contrasting color, into the fold of fabric exactly on the stitching line. Slide the needle about ¼ to ½ inch and pick up fabric on the matching stitching line of the corresponding piece The contrasting thread can be picked out easily once the permanent stitches are in place. This technique is demonstrated in the drawing on page 36.

Holding in a seam—To mold flat fabric to the curved body, just hold in some seam areas to fit the body. This technique is useful for fitting a plunging neckline. Here's what you do. Ask the person wearing the dress to sit. Pin a fold into the neckline to take up any gap. In general, for a nice finished look, ⅜ inch is about the maximum that can be taken up. If the fold is bigger, a filling dart or seam starting at the neckline may be needed. The fullness must be eased onto a piece of fabric tape. Cut the tape a bit longer than the desired length of the neckline edge, and mark it in five places: at the beginning and end of the desired length, in the middle, and halfway between these marks. Remove the pin that takes up the excess fabric, and divide and mark the neckline edge in the same way. Match the tape markings to the neckline markings

and use five pins to attach the tape to the wrong side of the fabric, centered on the seam line. Divide each section in half and pin at these points. Continue to further divide each area in half as the fabric rolls over your finger—pinning as you progress until all the excess fabric has been eased in. At this point, pins will be about as close together as they can be. Baste the tape along its center, with the tape facing up, and remove the pins. Hand-stitch down the middle of the tape, just to the inside of the basting line, with the fabric facing up. Use a short needle and single-ply size A silk thread to make tiny running stitches (the thread is three ply, so separate it as you would embroidery floss). Remove the basting; the fabric will look gathered.

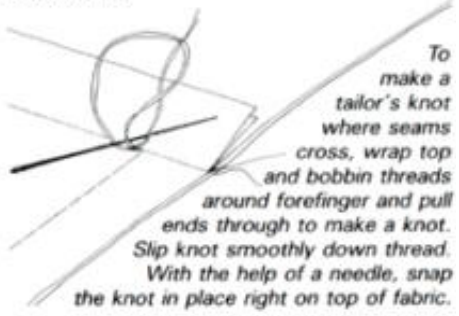
Press the stitches on the wrong side of the fabric. Then place the garment right side up over a curved surface, such as a tailor's ham. Use a damp cotton press cloth and apply pressure with the point of the iron to shrink out the fullness. As you work, move the iron out to the edge to smooth in the fullness. Keep the garment over the ham until the garment is dry. When pressing is finished, the fabric should be smooth. Fullness is held in at the neck and eased out in the bust area, giving a beautiful fit in all positions.

Seam finishes — Once they have been permanently stitched, seams should be trimmed to ⅜ inch or up to 1 inch in areas where further fitting may be needed. Seam edges on woven fabrics must be finished to prevent raveling. Kleibacker recommends hand overcasting, which is secure and creates a smooth edge without adding bulk.

Hand-overcast seams (photo, below left) are stitched with cotton sewing thread and a No. 8 or No. 10 needle. Insert the needle in the fabric parallel to the seam edge and about 1/16 inch away. If the needle is in your right hand, move from right to left, and control the fabric by rolling it over your left index finger. Stitches, made about ⅛ inch apart, appear slanted on the surface. Make them deeper and closer on more ravelly fabric. In very ravelly fabric it may be necessary to "cross your hand," overcasting in both directions to form an X stitch.

Where seams cross—When a seam crosses another seam, take care to avoid a tight, bulky point. Stitch the seam until you approach the crossing seam. Lift its seam allowance and stitch to the seam line. Stop machine-stitching, leaving a 6-inch-long thread. Pull the bobbin thread through to the top side and tie a tailor's knot, as shown in the drawing below. Don't be tempted to cheat and square knot; it will not be nearly as secure. Begin stitching again on the other side of the seam allowance. Begin and end all seams with tailor's knots instead of backstitching, which is frequently inaccurate and always causes a heavy area.

Tailor's knot


To make a tailor's knot where seams cross, wrap top and bobbin threads around forefinger and pull ends through to make a knot. Slip knot smoothly down thread. With the help of a needle, snap the knot in place right on top of fabric.

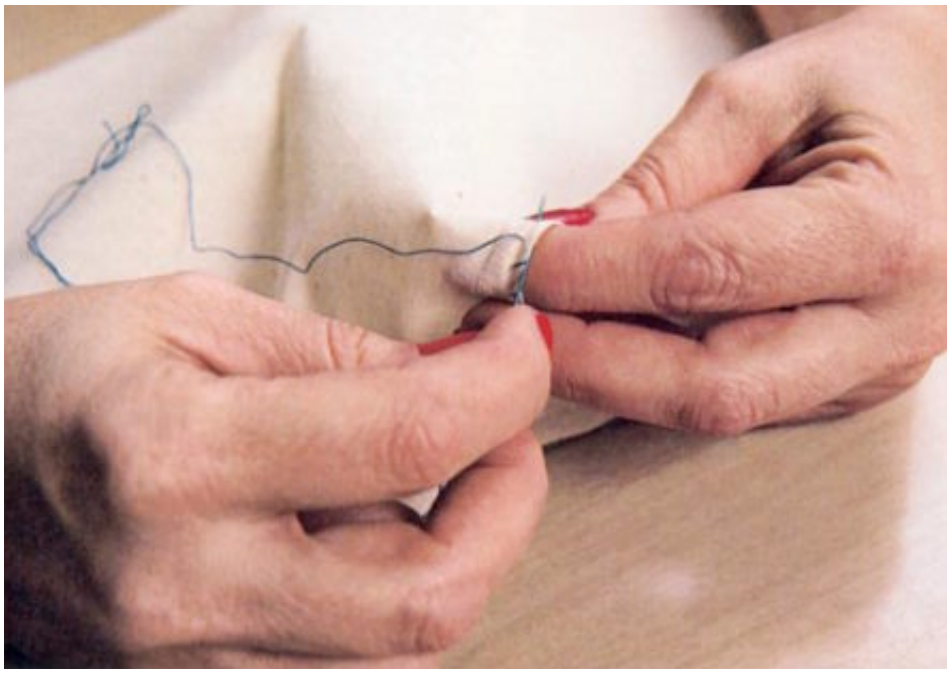
Facings and hems

Whenever possible, advises Kleibacker, use self-facings, generally about 1-inch-wide extensions of seam allowances at the garment's edge. They're comfortable, and they lie neatly. Near strong curves, facings can gap in a V-neck garment; sometimes making a clip, or cut, in the seam allowance will allow for fit. At the point of the V, a bar tack will secure seams.

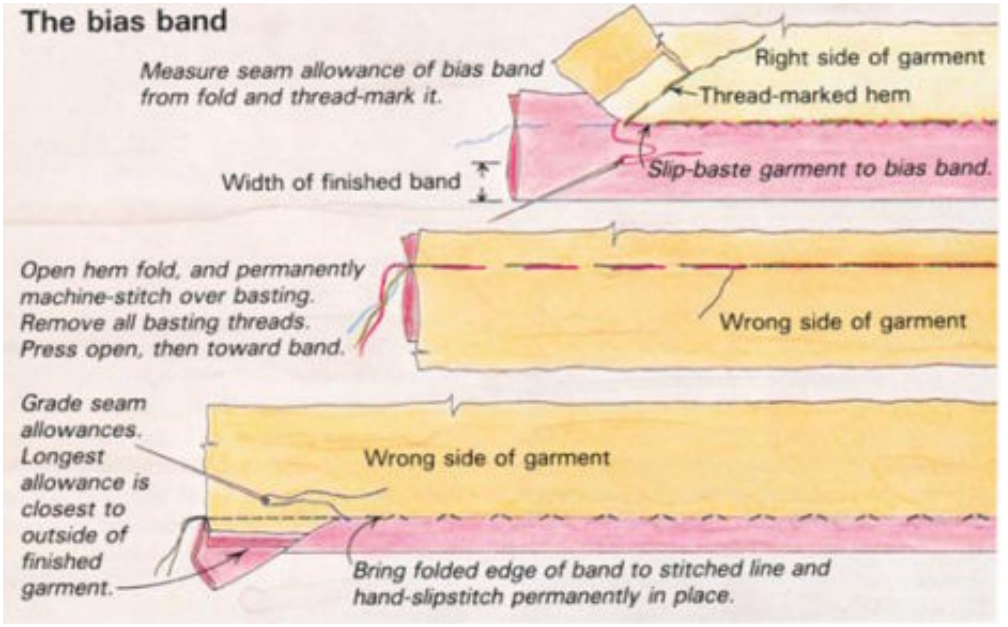
Facings may need to be stayed on the underside at the garment edge. Just inside the roll of the facing and centered on the seam line, sew a piece of fabric tape, making tiny stitches with a fine, short needle and single-ply size A silk thread. The work should be nearly invisible. Finish the facing's raw edge with hand overcasting, and secure the facing to the garment loosely, and only at seam intersections.

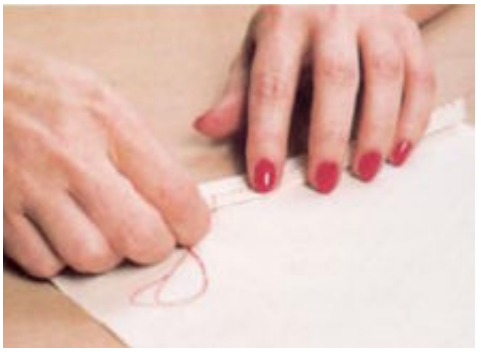
Bias bands—A garment edge may be finished with a decorative bias band rather than a facing. Bias bands vary in width, but not in method of application. They're cut on true bias, the diagonal line that bisects the right-angle intersections of warp and filling threads. The easiest way to establish true bias for cutting and serving purposes is to measure down the selvage a given amount, then across a filling thread the same amount, and to connect the two points with a straight edge.

To determine the width to cut the bias strip, decide how wide the finished band should be. Neckline bands can't be as wide as hemline bands. (Kleibacker achieves interesting designs with bias



To hand-overcast fabric edges (above), Rhodes works from right to left, using cotton thread and rolling the seam edge over her left forefinger. This results in slightly slanted parallel stitches that bind the raw edge without adding bulk, as seen in the finished garment at right.


The bias band
Measure seam allowance of bias band from fold and thread-mark it.
Right side of garment
Thread-marked hem
Width of finished band
Slip-baste garment to bias band.
Open hem fold, and permanently machine-stitch over basting. Remove all basting threads. Press open, then toward band.
Wrong side of garment
Grade seam allowances. Longest allowance is closest to outside of finished garment.
Wrong side of garment
Bring folded edge of band to stitched line and hand-slipstitch permanently in place.



Before sewing a tailor's hem, Rhodes hand-overcasts the cut edge of the hem, bastes it, and folds back about ¼ inch of fabric. The hem itself is stitched with a light hand, size A silk thread, and a No. 10 needle. Rhodes alternates from folded edge to face fabric, catching only one thread of the face fabric (demonstrated on muslin, left). The overcast edge is visible on the inside, but not on the outside, and bulk is avoided (right).

For a hand-rolled hem, Rhodes first machine-stitches about ¼ inch from the fabric edge and trims close to the stitching. She moistens her fingers and rolls the fabric over the machine stitching. Then she whipstitches over the roll, as shown. The stitches of the finished hem slant parallel to each other. The sizes of the roll and the stitches are exaggerated here for clarity. Aim for a tiny roll, and make stitches with a No. 10 needle and one strand of size A silk thread.

bands varying from 6 to 15 inches at hems.) Cut bias strips four times the desired width of the finished band plus twice the seam allowance.

If you don't have enough fabric for the entire length, don't panic. Bias strips can be joined together with little difficulty. Cut the ends of the pieces to be joined on straight grain and stitch (the cut ends will look diagonal, as will the seam).

The garment is applied to the bias, not vice versa. Neither side needs stretching or shrinking. To illustrate, let's assume you want a 3-inch-deep bias band rather than a traditional hem on the bottom of your skirt. The skit is completely finished, except for the hem, which has been thread-marked. Cut a (3 inches x 4) + (⅝ inch x 2) = 13¼-inch-wide bias band as long as the circumference of the skirt plus the seam allowances to join the ends. Fold the bias band in half lengthwise, and 6 inches from the fold thread-mark the seam allowance through both layers. Check the consistency of the seam allowance and adjust.

Fold the skirt hem under on the thread marked line, and bring the folded edge of the skirt over the cut edge of the bias hand, matching thread-marked lines. Slipping the two together and check width for consistency. Open the seam allowance on the wrong side of the garment and permanently machine-stitch directly on top of the basting. Remove all the basting, and press the seam allowances open. Then press all layers down toward the hem. Grade the seam allowance so that the layer nearest the outside of the garment is the longest, as shown in the drawing at left.

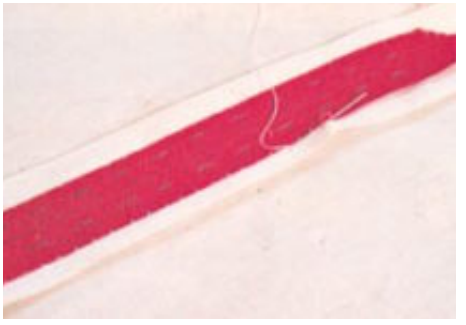
Fold the bias band in half toward the wrong side of the garment, edging the folded edge to the machine-stitching line. Permanently hand-slipstitch the band to the stitched line (The same technique works for a ¼ inch band at the neckline.)

Hems — Before a hem can be stitched, the garment's finished length must be determined. Kleibacker advises measuring from the floor so that the center back is ½ inch longer and the side areas are about ¼ inch longer than center front. This is the look he feels is flattering to most women.

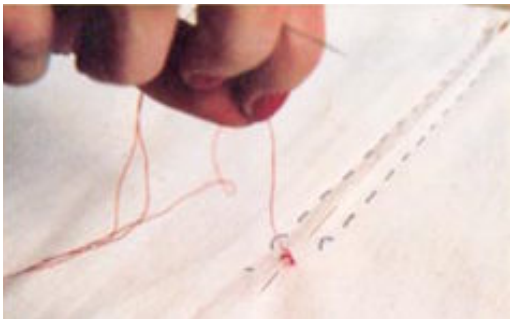
Thread-mark the fold line for the hem. Measure from the fold line and cut the hem's width. The straighter the skirt, the deeper the hem can be. The hem of a straight skirt can be 2½ inches wide, whereas a bias skirt that is very full may be best with a ½-inch hem.

Hand-overcast in matching cotton thread to finish the hem's raw edge. The hem itself is done in size A silk thread. Baste the hem up on the fold line. Then fold the top of the hem back on itself about ½ inch or less and sew a tailor's hem, which crosses back and forth from the garment to the hem. When the stitch is made in the garment, only *one* thread of the fabric is picked up—or if the fabric is lined, only the underling is caught. When the stitch is made in the hem, several threads are caught. The secret is to keep the stitches as loose as possible, but tight enough to hold the hem in place. If the hem has bias

Rhodes hand-bastes the zipper in place (above) so the teeth are slightly more than covered and the basting fans out sufficiently to cover the tab. Then she zips the zipper to check that a tiny overlap occurs in the center of the slot.



Rhodes permanently stitches the zipper (red) with tiny running stitches equidistant from the folded edge, using one strand of size A silk thread and a No. 10 needle. The stitches fan out at the top to cover the zipper tab (top right).



After stitching the front of the zipper, Rhodes slipstitches (white) the edge of the zipper tape to the seam allowance (near right).

When the zipper is complete, the base of the zipper needs a bar tack for security. Rhodes whips several stitches and works a buttonhole stitch over them (far right).

folds because of flare, loosely stretch them and allow them to fall in place. Don't try to nail them down or control them in any way—the inside of the hem may look prettier, but the garment's outer appearance and hang won't be nearly as satisfactory. Press the hem lightly, using a press cloth, leaving a roll at the bottom edge.

Hand-rolled hems can finish any edge on lightweight fabrics. To achieve a good rolled hem, keep the roll tiny and the stitches fine. To ensure the evenness and stability of the garment edge, machine-stitch about ¼ inch from the fabric's cut edge with a normal stitch length and cotton thread. Next, trim the fabric as close as possible to the machine stitching, but trim only as much of the hem as you can expect to complete in one sitting. Roll the fabric on the edge, moistening your fingers to help get the roll started. Whipstitch the roll in place with a fine, short needle and single-ply size A silk thread. The needle enters the roll parallel to the edge, and the stitch comes forward. The stitches should have a slight, but consistent, slant. Don't pull the stitches too tight, unless you want a scalloped edge. If you hold the needle in your right hand, you can hold the roll, which is ready to be stitched, over the index finger of your left hand (see bottom photo, facing page).

The zipper

Kleibacker's choice is a centered slot zipper. Aesthetically, this is the most balanced and least bulky application possible on the side or center of a garment. Leave the zipper area of the garment unstitched, and press back the seam allowances. Place the open zipper in the garment opening. With the face of the fabric up, position the folded edge of the opening so that it just barely covers the teeth of the open zipper. Baste the zipper in place, as shown in the top photo at left. When the zipper is zipped, the folds overlap a shy 1/16 inch. When the garment is worn, the zipper slot lays flat, with enough fabric to conceal the teeth.

At the top of the zipper, let the basting fan, or angle, out so the zipper pull is covered by the lap of the zipper slot. Permanently stitch the zipper by hand, using a fine, short needle and matching size A silk thread. Sew tiny running stitches, not back-stitches, about ⅛ inch from the folded edge. (They also fan out slightly at the top of the zipper, just enough so that the folds cover the zipper tab.) The backstitch, often taught for hand-applied zippers, creates "nails" that secure the fabric to the zipper and hold them together when the body moves. Kleibacker feels that the garment needs to move with the body, and the running stitch allows that flexibility in the zipper area.

After you've stitched the zipper on both sides, work a bar tack at the bottom of the zipper by whipping a small area across the zipper's end and then working a buttonhole stitch over the whipped stitch. On the inside of the garment, trim the zipper bottom into a V-shape before slipstitching the edge of the zipper to the seam allowance. ❑

Resources

These textile references are available through interlibrary loans.

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American Home Economics Association. *Textile Handbook,* 4th ed. Washington, D.C.: AHEA, 1970.

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Wingate, Isabel B., ed. *Fairchild's Dictionary of Textiles,* 6th ed. New York: Fairchild Publications, 1979.

Wingate, Isabel B., and June, F. Mohier. *Textile Fabrics and Their Selection.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1984.

Here's a mail-order and walk-in source for the Sussman iron, large sheets of dressmaker carbon, cotton and silk threads, and other sewing supplies:

Greenberg and Hammer, 24 W. 57th St., New York, NY 10019; (212) 246-2836.

For information on workshops by Charles Kleibacker, contact Dr. Elizabeth A. Rhodes, head of Human, Environmental, and Consumer Resources, Eastern Michigan University, Ypsilanti, MI 48197; (313) 487-1217. Photos pages 34-37 by Roger McLeod.

Amazing Lace

Using these techniques, it's versatile, forgiving, and surprisingly easy to sew

BY SUSAN KHALJE

(from issue #124)

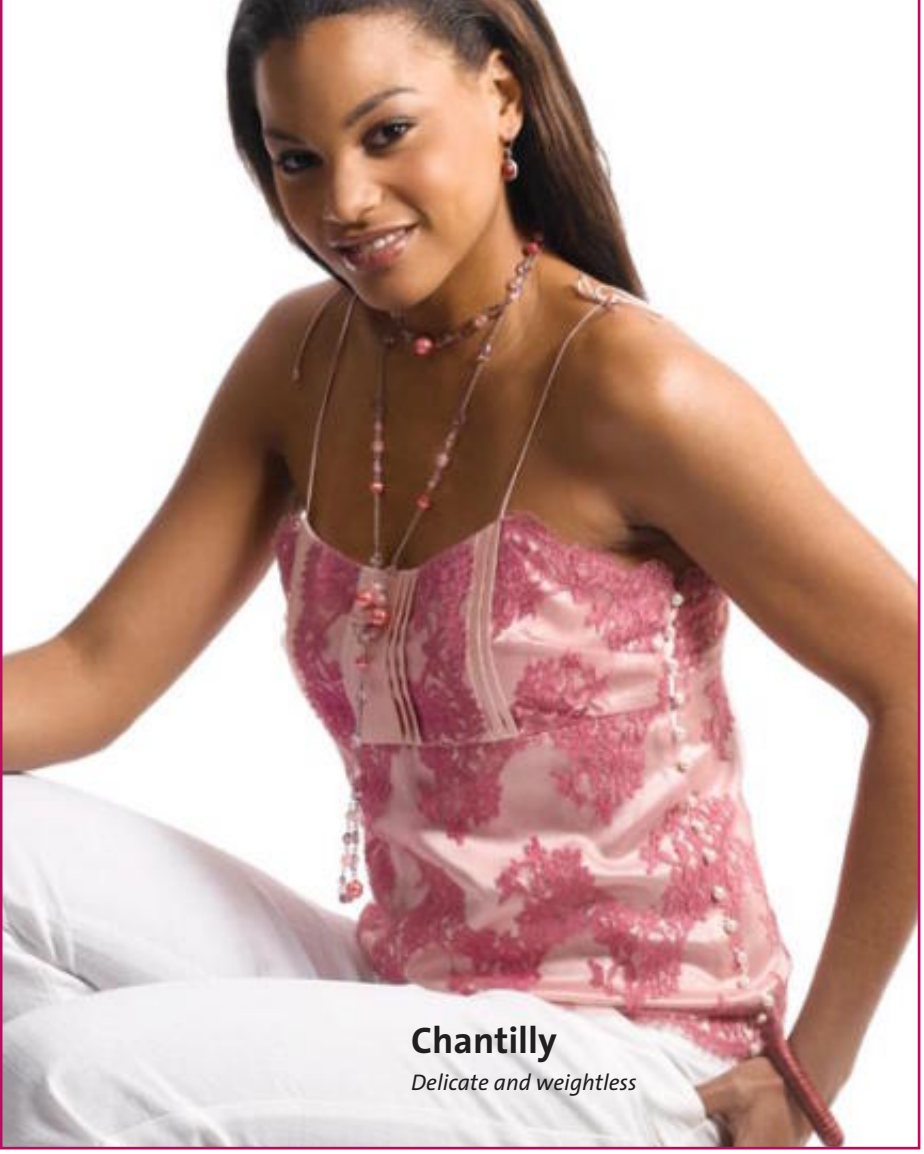
Guipure
Densely patterned and heavy

Lace fabric is unlike any other: Its unique weave structure calls for special (though not difficult) sewing techniques, but garments made from it always stand out in a crowd. Lace can be as elegant, sophisticated, feminine, and frivolous as you like. I love working with lace and have found it can be incorporated into almost any wardrobe, even if you favor tailored or casual looks.

Sewing lace is more straightforward than you might guess. Some of the techniques for constructing a lace garment are unconventional, but they make perfect sense once you're familiar with the fabric's characteristics.

Three varieties to savor

Fine lace comes in a rainbow of colors and a mind-boggling array of styles—in fact, many lengths of lace are virtually one of a kind. Alençon, Chantilly, and guipure (pronounced: *ghi-PYUR*) are the most versatile types; each has its own qualities and handling requirements (see the following pages for details). They're generally woven in widths of 36 inches or less and have



Chantilly
Delicate and weightless

> “Fine lace comes in a mind-boggling array of styles.”

Alençon
Elegant and strong

lovely borders. Guipure and some Alençons can be cut apart and pieced together to take full advantage of their intricate designs. (Be aware that all types are delicate and should be handled gently during construction and wear.) Once you've fallen in love with a piece of lace, study it to familiarize yourself with the density and repeat of its pattern and symmetry and the mirror-imaging of motifs. Lace is complex to produce, so don't be surprised to find prices starting at $60 per yard and topping $600 per yard for heavily embellished yardage. A little lace goes a long way, though, and a lace garment you love will always be in style.

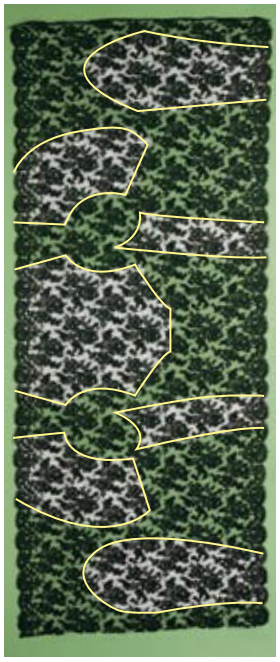
Susan Khalje, of Glenarm, Maryland, is the author of Bridal Couture *(Krause, 1997).*

continued

Borders guide your layout

Laying out a pattern on lace is the best way to figure out how much yardage to purchase.

Begin with a pattern that's been properly fitted and make a full copy of it in muslin, minus seam and hem allowances. Label each piece so that you're sure to have the correct number of right and left sections; take the muslin pattern to the store. Unfold a length of lace fabric, right side up, and arrange the pattern pieces under it, also right sides up. Use the lace's borders for hems and edges, and try to maintain symmetry between right and left halves of the garment. When possible, arrange adjoining seamlines so that border motifs will appear continuous when the garment is sewn. Your trial layout shows exactly how much lace you need.



Alençon can stand on its own

Alençon lace features corded embroidery around its motifs; as long as the motifs are densely placed, you can cut around them and piece the lace into the desired shape, without an underlay.

1. THREAD-TRACE AND CUT OUT THE PATTERN

Pin the muslin pattern pieces to the lace, pinning through motifs, not the delicate net. Thread-trace around the perimeter of each pattern piece to transfer its outline to the lace; mark darts the same way. Cut out the pattern pieces, leaving wide seam allowances and preserving full motifs that straddle seamlines.

2. CUT, OVERLAP, AND STITCH DARTS

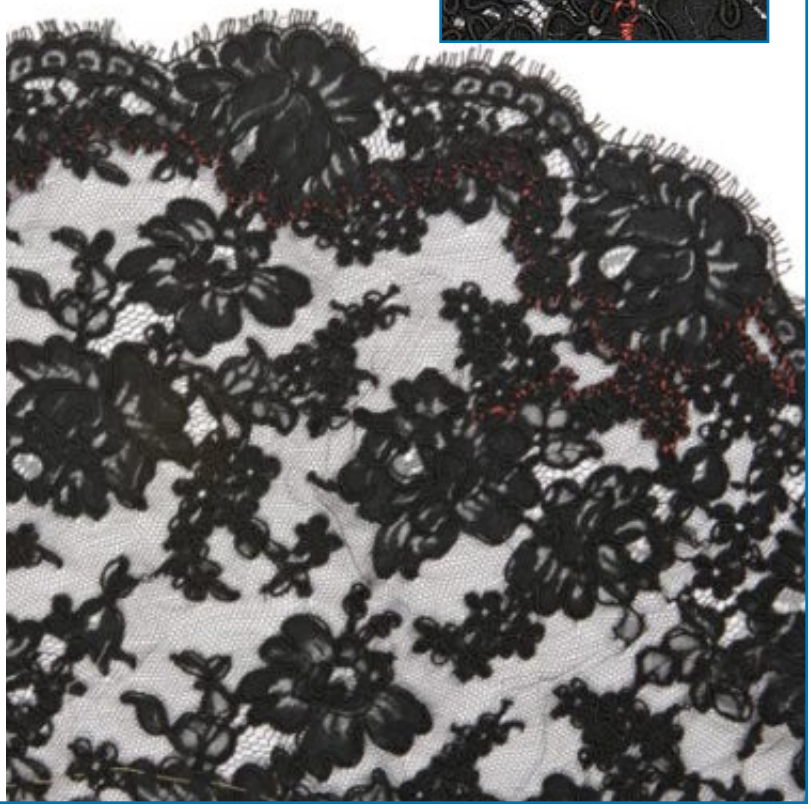
Darts that won't be subject to stress are overlapped and sewn. In the vicinity of the marked dart (it's not necessary to be exactly on the markings), define a route that follows the corded edge of one or more motifs—I call this the "leading edge." Cut open the dart on this line as shown at left, and overlap the leading edge, aligning the dart markings. Pin the dart closed, and sew it by hand, stitching through all layers along the corded leading edge. On the interior of the garment, trim away the lace underlap of the dart, fairly close to the stitching.

Model photos: Jack Deutsch; hair and makeup, Sylvia Pichler. Process photos: Carol Fresia, except p. 32 (top left and bottom left), p. 34 (bottom left), p. 35 (all), and p. 37 (top right and center right), Scott Phillips

3. ATTACH BORDERS AND JOIN SEAMS

The major seams of a lace garment, like darts, are lapped and sewn. Below, the scalloped border has been shaped and joined by hand to the front opening of the bolero. You can sew lapped seams by machine, using a zigzag stitch and sewing around the corded edges of motifs; stitch slowly to prevent machine threads from tangling. For lapped seams, create a leading edge by trimming one seam allowance along the edges of the motifs, lapping this over the other seam allowance with the marked seamlines aligned, and sewing it in place. Trim away the excess underlap.

Sew seams that receive stress, such as sleeve and armscye seams, by machine, right sides together.



Keep armscye seam allowances out of sight: *Bind them with organza that matches the wearer's skin tone. (Bolero designed and sewn by Pamela Metcalf; Alençon lace: B & J Fabrics, New York)*

tip

Patch small holes

Use lace fragments to fill in minor openings like the one shown here. Sew them by hand, working through motifs to hide your stitches.

Strengthen Alençon with underlining

To fashion this lace into a close-fitting style, incorporate a strong but sheer underlay such as silk organza or Swiss illusion (shown here). The techniques used for adding an underlay are demonstrated on a narrow sleeve.

PREPARE THE UNDERLAY

Cut a sheer underlay piece for each pattern section, and chalk-trace the seamlines of the pattern onto it. Hand-baste over the chalk lines.

SEW THE HEM FIRST

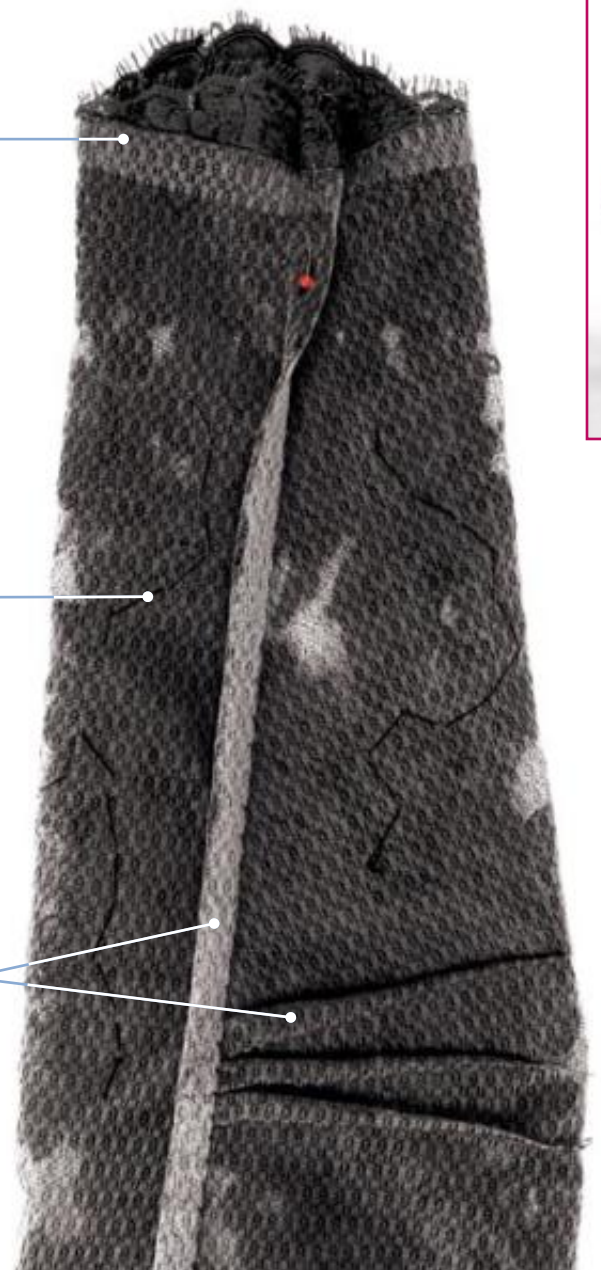
Machine-staystitch along the underlay hemline. Fold the hem allowance toward the wrong side of the sleeve, along the stitching line. Slipstitch the folded edge along the desired hemline of the lace sleeve. Use the intersections of the scallops to define a workable hemline.

JOIN THE TWO LAYERS

Aligning the layers carefully, baste the lace and the underlay together along their seamlines. Anchor the lace to the underlay by hand tacking through the most prominent motifs of the lace.

MACHINE-STITCH DARTS AND SEAM

To camouflage the seam allowances, trim both lace allowances and one underlay allowance. Bind the trimmed edges with the remaining wide underlay allowance.



> “Enjoy Chantilly lace’s delicacy in lightweight, softly draping garments.”

Camisole: author’s design; Chantilly lace: Lace Star, New York

Chantilly lace works best as an overlay

Think of Chantilly lace as an embellishment added to a foundation fabric. It's too fragile to stand on its own but is lovely as an overlay, especially when its decorative borders are used as part of the garment design, as in the camisole shown here.

START WITH A CHARMEUSE FOUNDATION

Carbon-trace, then thread-trace, the seamlines and center front and back onto the charmeuse pattern pieces. Finish the hem, and press under the upper-bodice edges.

With the charmeuse pieces as a pattern, position the lace as desired, using the borders decoratively along edges as shown in the finished garment below.

Cut the lace pieces, leaving generous seam allowances. Hand-baste the lace to the right side of the charmeuse and then treat the layers as one during construction.

CONSTRUCT THE GARMENT

Use French seams for a sturdy, clean finish. Because a zipper would have been too heavy and stiff for this delicate garment, a narrow charmeuse placket with loops and buttons was added as a closure.

Embellished guipure lace: Lace Star, New York

Guipure's weight requires a substantial foundation

This heavy, densely patterned lace—which doesn't have a net backing—works best when tacked to a structured underlayer and shaped to fit it. It's ideal for simple styles like this straight skirt, where side seams can be eliminated or converted to darts.

SEW THE FOUNDATION SKIRT FIRST, THEN APPLY THE LACE

Mark seamlines, darts, grainlines, and horizontal guidelines on a muslin underlining; baste it to the coral charmeuse fabric, and thread-trace all markings through both layers. Sew the darts and side seams, from hip to hem; complete the hem.

Lay out the lace, and spread the partially completed skirt on top of it, both facedown. Align the skirt hem along the lace selvage, and use the basted guidelines to position the lower portion on the lace's grain.

Trim the excess lace around the skirt, and tack the layers together, working from the lace's right side. Tack the hem edge, followed by the center-front and center-back lines, and then in parallel rows from the front hem to waist, avoiding the areas between the darts and side seams. Use tiny backstitches, loosely carrying the thread between them.

"Use the regular geometry of

SCULPT AND SEW THE HIP DARTS

Complete the side seams of the underskirt, leaving the lace layer free. Pin the skirt to a dress form, and pinch out darts to eliminate the excess lace around the waist (below left).

Cut between motifs to open the dart area. Overlap the cut edges to form the dart. Sew the dart by hand in small increments through all layers of the lace and underskirt, snipping away the underlapped lace, bit by bit, as you stitch from the point of the dart to the waistline. Aside from the minor disruption to the lace's pattern, the dart will be invisible once stitched. Machine-stitch a conventional seam at center back, aligning the motifs. Insert a zipper by hand, line the skirt, and finish the waist.

guipure to plan a perfect layout."

THE PLACE FOR LACE

A visit to New York City's Lace Star (215 West 40th Street; 212-840-0555) will open your eyes to the incredible variety of laces available. Just around the corner, B & J Fabrics (525 7th Avenue; 212-354-8150) stocks a large selection of beautiful lace fabrics as well. Unless you're a true risk taker, don't plan to purchase lace fabric via mail order. It's essential to see the full piece of lace to assess its suitability to your project.

The Comfortable Side of Couture

Practical techniques of Coco Chanel

by Claire Shaeffer (from issue #23)

When Coco Chanel reopened the House of Chanel in 1954, she was already a legend. Between the wars, her innovative designs had included comfortable, easy-to-wear clothes frequently inspired by menswear, children's school blazers, working-class garments, and sailors' uniforms. Chanel turned ordinary fabrics—wool, tweeds, mottled wool flannels (kasha), and knobby linens—into luxury garments; and she used luxury laces to create under-stated shirtdresses. Chanel made it chic to look poor and charged outrageously for the privilege. Compared with Dior's collection of heavily structured garments, which often required waist cinchers, the clothes in Chanel's 54 collection fit the body easily. Older women looked younger and slimmer, while young women looked sophisticated and elegant. The Chanel suit dominated fashion in the early '60s. Thousands of women wore them, including America's trendsetter, Jacqueline Kennedy.

Although the influence of the couture house faded after Chanel's death in 1971, in 1983 Karl Lagerfeld was installed as couture designer to rejuvenate the Chanel collections. He boldly introduced wit and youth to the Chanel look, creating clothes Chanel herself might have designed. This year, the Chanel influence on designers, such as Carolyn Roehm, Ralph Lauren, Bill Blass, Yves Saint Laurent and Adolfo is particularly strong. Lightweight jackets with chain belts, gilded buttons, and bold fake jewelry saturate the luxury ready-to-wear market.

Designers like Adolfo are still being influenced by Chanel's distinct use of such details as fabrics with a handwoven texture, gold buttons, jewelry chains, and lots of trim.

The not-so-basic suit—At first glance, the Chanel suit merely looks like a boxy jacket with a matching skirt and well-coordinated blouse. When we closely examine it, however, we realize that nothing has been left to chance, either in the way it is worn or in its construction and fit. The suit was a well-planned ensemble. The jacket and skirt linings matched the blouse so that wearing the suit with another blouse was almost impossible. A blouse was often sewn to the skirt, resulting in a "dress" whose blouse always remained properly tucked in.

Many Chanel techniques, such as quilting the lining to the jacket shell and stitching gilded chains to the hem, control the set of the garment on the body or prolong its pristine appearance. Functional buttons and buttonholes adhere to the design principles that Chanel set for herself. Many of these "Chanelisms" are labor-intensive techniques, but home sewers can apply them to enhance a special jacket, just as I did when I made my jacket (photo below), using a commercially available pattern.

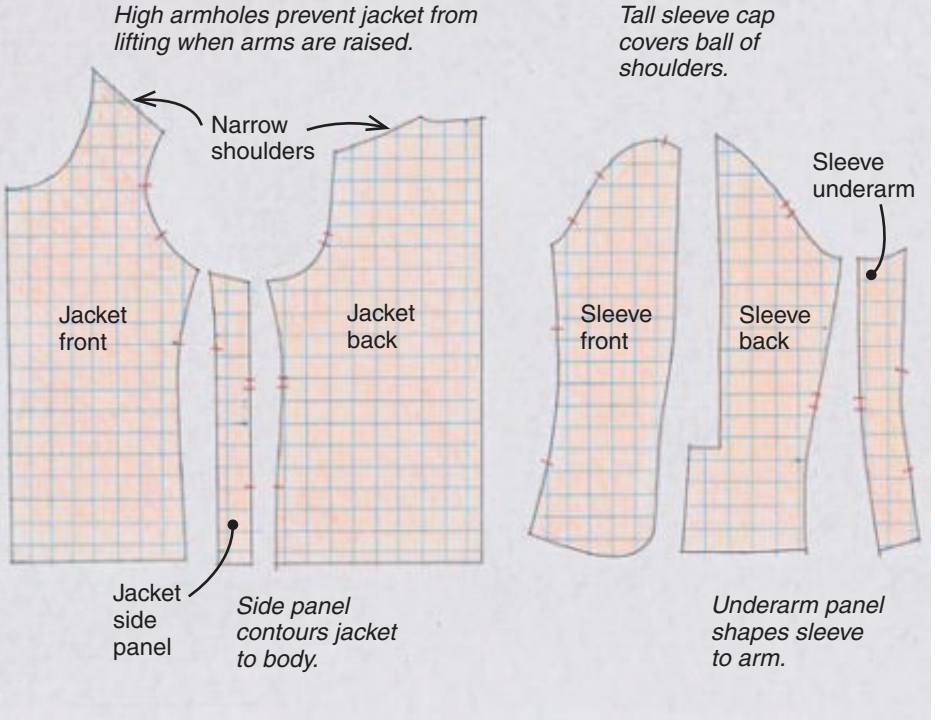
Chanel designed suits for comfort and mobility. Extremely narrow-cut shoulders and small, high armholes (almost 1 inch higher than normal) let the wearer raise or cross her arms without having the jacket lift or bind across the back (drawing below). A narrow, straight side panel creates a slight indentation at the waist and a slim silhouette. The three-piece sleeve, which conforms to the natural curve of the arm, seems to have a life of its own.

Chanel suits are lightweight, which adds to their comfort, because they're assembled without traditional interfacings, underlinings, facings, and heavy linings. The jacket has only two fabric layers: the shell, or fashion fabric, and a blouse-weight lining. Shell fabrics are often soft, loose and textured handwovens; many are Scottish wools or Linton tweeds, while others are guipure lace (embroidery on a background that's dissolved), chenille, or sequin embroideries.

Linings of silk gauze, China silk, silk foulard, silk satin or shantung, and wool jersey often contrast with the shell fabric in color, design or texture. Most linings are luxurious, delicate materials that feel wonderful next to the skin. Few are suited to hard wear. Linings extend to the shell's edge and can be completely hidden, can peek out as a subtle trim, or can be boldly exposed on flipped-back collars and revers.

The linings were machine-quilted to the shell so the loose structure of the outer fabric wouldn't sag and bag and the garment would maintain its shape. The quilting is almost invisible, since the stitching thread often matches the color of one of the shell-fabric elements.

Pattern drawn from Shaeffer's study of a 1972 Chanel jacket
(1-in. grid)


High armholes prevent jacket from lifting when arms are raised.
Tall sleeve cap covers ball of shoulders.
Narrow shoulders
Sleeve underarm
Jacket front
Jacket back
Sleeve front
Sleeve back
Jacket side panel
Side panel contours jacket to body.
Underarm panel shapes sleeve to arm.

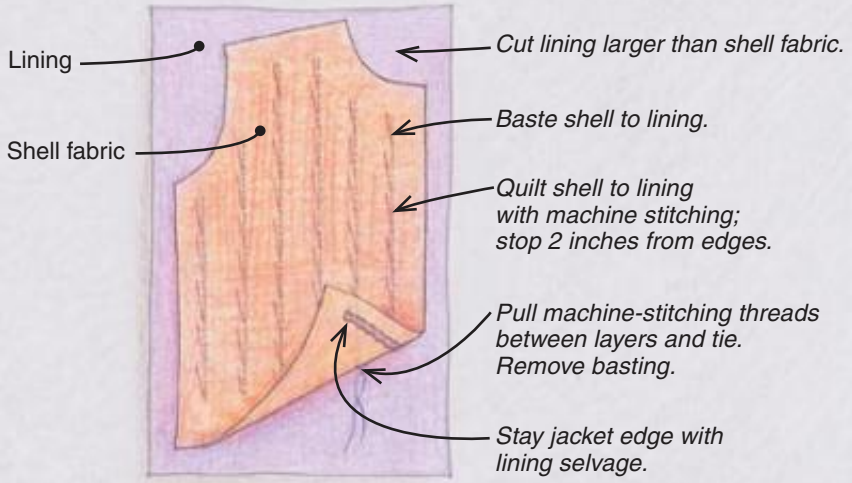
Claire Shaeffer wears a princess-line jacket that she made, using Chanel's techniques and slightly modified Vogue pattern #1919. Horizontal rather than vertical quilting works with the princess seams and cross-rib fabric. (Photo by Steve Medd)

It isn't a bit unusual to find Chanel suits sporting ten or more buttons. Buttons were often custom-made, dyed to match, or painted to accent the fabric design. Some are simple fabric buttons encircled with large or small gold rings; one of my favorites features a small gilded button encircled with fabric.

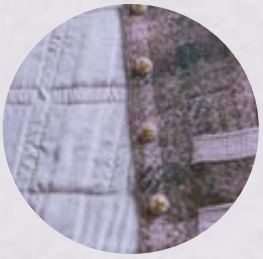
The hand-worked buttonholes on the original suits were hand-stitched on the shell fabric and finished with a bound buttonhole on the lining. This technique actually solves two problems: The loosely woven fabric is too unstable to support bound buttonholes; and hand-worked buttonholes are relatively unattractive on the wrong side, which is accentuated when the silk thread doesn't match the lining.

The "Chaneliest" Chanels are trimmed at jacket edges, pockets, and sleeve vents. A great deal of imagination and ingenuity went into these trims. Some of my favorites include rows of topstitching, plaited yarns on top of grosgrain, selvage or selvage combined with braided bands, and linings extended to look like pipings.

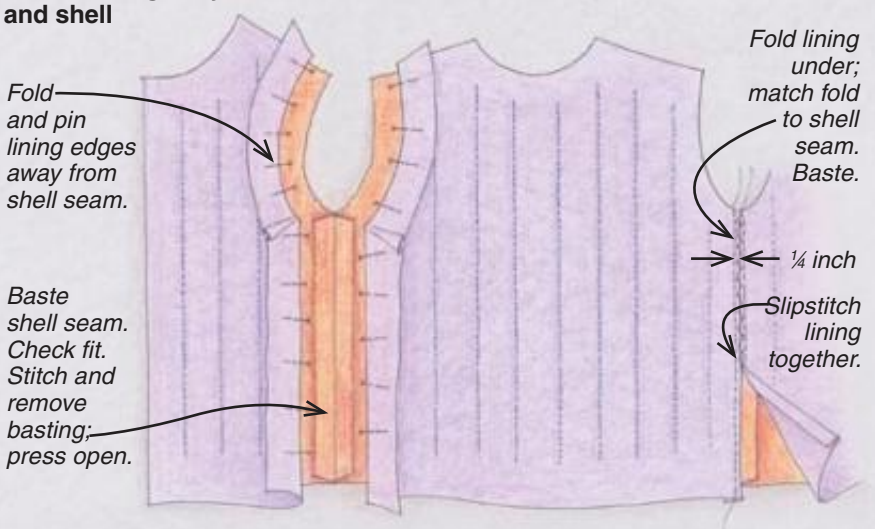
Quilting shell to lining


Lining
Shell fabric
Cut lining larger than shell fabric.
Baste shell to lining.
Quilt shell to lining with machine stitching; stop 2 inches from edges.
Pull machine-stitching threads between layers and tie. Remove basting.
Stay jacket edge with lining selvage.

Quilting pattern depends on shell-fabric design. Rectangles disappear in plaids.



Constructing the jacket and shell


Fold and pin lining edges away from shell seam.
Baste shell seam. Check fit. Stitch and remove basting; press open.
Fold lining under; match fold to shell seam. Baste.
¼ inch
Slipstitch lining together.

Quilted lining—The parts of the jacket are quilted to the lining before the side, shoulder, or sleeve seams are stitched. The pieces are pinned to the lining, then basted and stitched along the quilting lines. The shell is basted together, fitted, and attached at the side seams and shoulders; then the lining is hand-stitched together.

The quilting pattern—vertical, horizontal, or rectangular—is determined by the shell fabric and garment design. Examine the shell fabric to decide where the quilt stitching will be placed. The quilting rows should be inconspicuous and parallel to grain lines and stripes. Generally, tweeds and fabrics without prominent fabric patterns are quilted vertically; however, when designs have princess seams, horizontal quilting rows, perpendicular to the seamline, maybe less conspicuous. Quilted rectangles are inconspicuous on plaids (photo inset on left). When you're quilting lace or large prints, hand-quilt around the motifs.

Lining tends to shrink when quilted. Instead of cutting the lining exactly to the shape of the jacket pieces, I cut rectangular pieces with little or no shaping (top drawing, left). On both the shell fabric and the lining, first stitch and press any vertical seams (princess, center-back, etc.) on the front and back sections. Lay the lining section wrong side up on a table. Cover it with the shell fabric, right side up. Pin the layers together, matching the grain lines so the lining will remain smooth without shifting when you baste. Using white cotton basting thread, baste the shell to the lining so the basted fines are parallel to the planned quilt stitching; remove the pins.

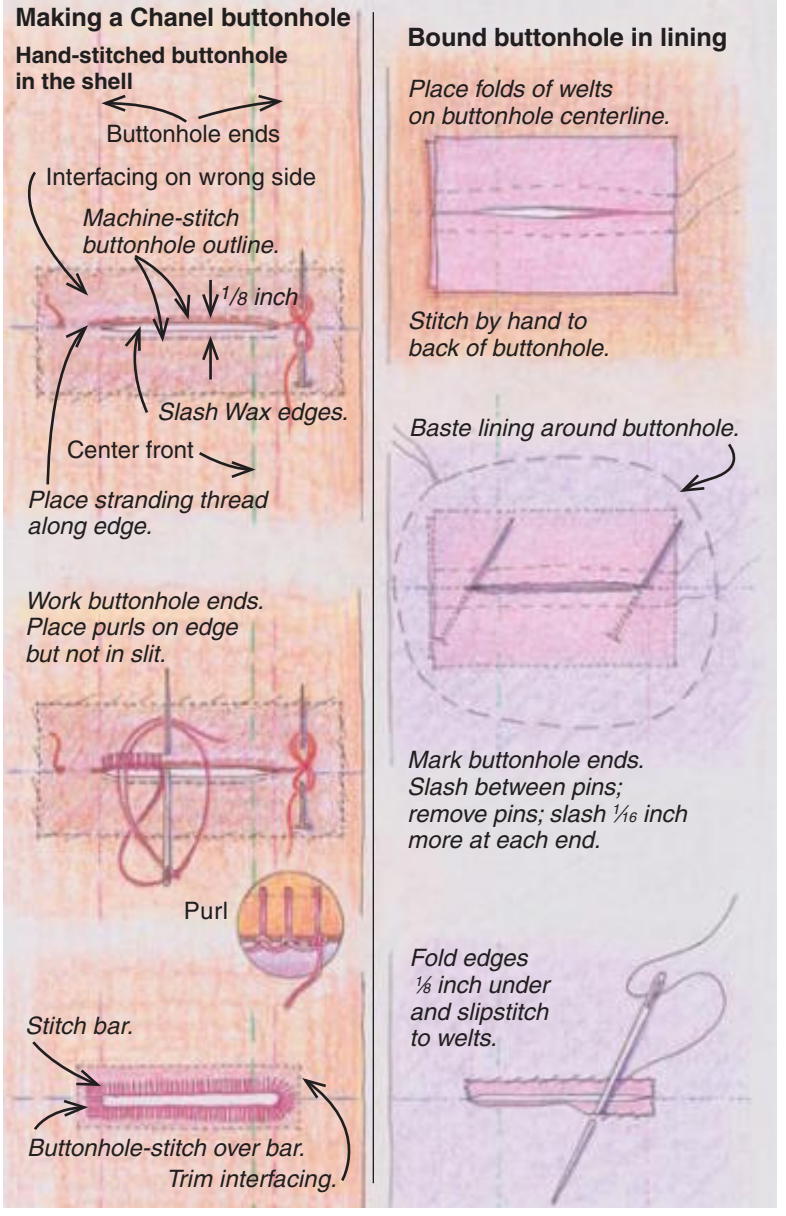
With the shell fabric on top, machine-quilt each section with silk floss, machine-embroidery thread, or mercerized cotton. Stop and start about 2 inches from the edges so you can complete side seams, trims, and buttonholes; leave the threads long. Pull the threads into the space between the shell and lining; knot and trim the ends.

Complete the side, shoulder, and sleeve seams of the shell fabric (bottom drawing). Fold and pin the lining fabric out of the way: With the right sides of the shell sections together, baste the seams. Then check the fit-the quilting may have caused the sections to shrink. Stitch, remove the basting, and press the seams open.

To stitch the lining seams, fold one raw edge under so that the folded edge touches the seamline; pin and baste approximately ¼ inch from the folded edge. Repeat for the corresponding edge. Slipstitch the lining edges together.

Chanel buttonhole—The Chanel buttonhole (drawing and photo, facing page) has a fan instead of an eyelet to accommodate the shank of the button and a bar at the other end. The buttonholes are worked before the lining is stitched down at the edges of the jacket.

Pin the lining fabric out of tile way. Interface the buttonhole areas in the shell with preshrunk muslin or firmly woven lining fabric; baste the rectangular interfacing to the wrong side with diagonal stitches.


Making a Chanel buttonhole
Hand-stitched buttonhole in the shell
Buttonhole ends
Interfacing on wrong side
Machine-stitch buttonhole outline.
1/8 inch
Slash Wax edges.
Center front
Place stranding thread along edge.
Work buttonhole ends. Place purls on edge but not in slit.
Purl
Stitch bar.
Buttonhole-stitch over bar.
Trim interfacing.
Bound buttonhole in lining
Place folds of welts on buttonhole centerline.
Stitch by hand to back of buttonhole.
Baste lining around buttonhole.
Mark buttonhole ends. Slash between pins; remove pins; slash 1/16 inch more at each end.
Fold edges 1/8 inch under and slipstitch to welts.

A hand-stitched buttonhole in this jacket's shell stabilizes the loosely woven fabric, while a bound buttonhole in the lining hides the back.

Carefully mark the buttonhole positions with white basting thread. So that the layers won't slip while you're working and the fabric won't fray, stitch around each buttonhole with short stitches, overlapping tile stitching on one long edge by three or four stitches. Pull the threads through to the wrong side; then knot and trim them.

Cut the buttonholes with a mat knife or single-edge razor blade. To create a more attractive fan, insert an awl into the end near the garment opening before making the slit. To prevent fraying, cut precisely along the thread of the material, and seal the buttonhole slit with beeswax. To apply the wax, fold the buttonhole slit lengthwise, wrong sides together. Heat the blade of a small paring knife, rub the blade over the wax, and rub the raw edges of the slit with the waxed knife. Repeat as needed.

Tailored buttonholes are worked on the right side of the fabric. To create a purl (knot) with a figure-eight shape and produce an identical knot each time, wrap both threads from the needle's eye under the point of the needle. You can work the buttonholes from right to left or left to right. Loop the thread from the needle under the needle in the same direction.

Work the purls over a strand of silk floss, machine-embroidery thread (size 30), or topstitching thread in a matching color to raise the texture. Wax the strand thread to strengthen it and to reduce knotting and twisting. Press the thread with a warm iron between sheets of paper so that the wax melts into the plies. Thread a needle and knot one end; if the fabric is heavy, strand the buttonhole with two plies instead of one ply. Place the knot about ½ inch from the end of the buttonhole slit; bring the thread out at the end of the slit. Lay the stranding thread along one edge of the buttonhole; secure the other end by wrapping it around a pin. After you've worked half of the buttonhole, strand the other half.

Using machine-embroidery thread or waxed silk floss and a small needle, make the buttonhole stitches around the slit. Cut the thread long enough to complete the buttonhole without cutting a second piece; generally, a ¾-inch buttonhole can be worked with ¾ yard of floss.

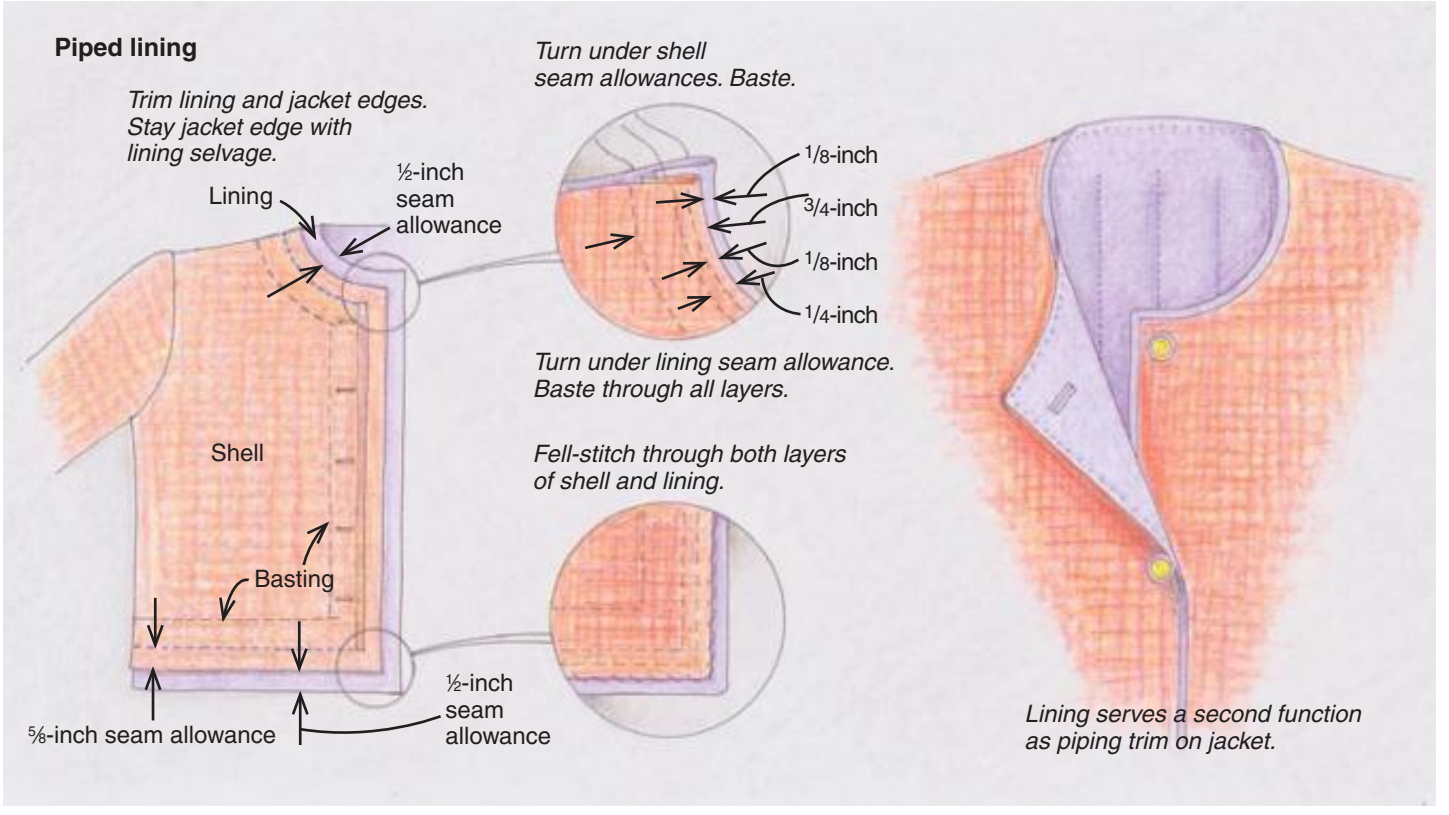
Pull the thread straight up from the fabric so the knot or purl is on top of the fabric at the edge; it shouldn't be inside the buttonhole slit. If the purl isn't exactly where you want it, use your thumbnails to position it correctly. Place stitches so there is one thread of fabric between each stitch.

When you reach the fan of the slit, release the stranding thread from the pin and hold it in place with your thumbnail around the fan. Work five to nine evenly spaced stitches around the fan over the stranding thread, with one stitch in line with the buttonhole slit. Keep the purls close together so the buttonhole will be strong enough to withstand the wear from the button shank. Count the stitches so you can make all buttonholes the same. Work down the other side of the buttonhole to the end.

Finish the buttonhole with a bar—two or three stitches across the end of the buttonhole. Work several stitches over the

The selvage from the shell fabric is basted, then machine-stitched to this jacket's edge. Braid or woven tape is hand-stitched to the outside edge of a selvage trim, leaving openings for buttonholes.

Topstitching, around the collar and down the front of the jacket above, is the simplest trim. (Suit courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.) Grosgrain ribbon hand- stitched to the edge of the jacket below brings out the pattern of plaited yard.



bar. Knot the thread and pop it to the underside. When you've completed the buttonhole, cut off the stranding-thread knot; pull the thread to the underside at the end of the buttonhole; and cut the ends close to the material. Trim the interfacing approximately ⅛ inch from the buttonhole.

For each bound buttonhole in the lining, cut two welts 1 inch wide and 1 inch longer than the buttonhole. Cut the welts on the lengthwise grain unless the lining has horizontal stripes that are to be matched. Fold the welts lengthwise, wrong sides together, and press. Pin the welts to the back of the buttonhole, and secure them permanently with a short running stitch.

You can finish the lining now or wait until you finish the jacket edges. Baste the lining around the buttonhole. Carefully mark the ends of the buttonhole with pins; clip between the pins, and another 1/16 inch at each end. Using a small needle with thread to match the lining, begin in the center of the buttonhole. Turn under a scant ⅛ inch and slipstitch the folded edge to the welts. I prefer to sew around the buttonhole twice instead of making tiny stitches: When you reach the ends, use the needle point to shape the opening into a rectangle. Overcast the corners firmly to make them square.

Trims—Apply trims after the jacket is quilted but before stitching the lining to the jacket edge or making the buttonholes. While some trims are stitched on top of the jacket edge, others are attached to the outside edge, so adjust your pattern accordingly.

The House of Chanel frequently has a fabric manufacturer provide it with matching yarns or fancy, wide selvages and companion trims. Knitters and weavers can create one-of-a-kind bands and yarn trims. Weavers can custom-weave strips or decorative selvages or use matching yarns. The rest of us will have to be content with combining purchased braids, ribbons, and yarns that were unraveled from the fabric.

I rarely use gilded braids and lace, which look great on after-five jackets, but are too glitzy at lunchtime. Generally, shiny rayon braids are more suitable for dressy jackets, while dull-wool or polyester braids look better on sportier designs; but, when placed on a grosgrain base, even shiny braids can look sporty.

Topstitched trim, one of my favorites, features many rows of topstitching on the overlap, collar and flap edges, and sleeve placket (top-right photo, facing page). Using a regular stitch length (1.75 mm or 15 stitches/inch), edgestitch 1/16 inch from the edge. Stitch 8 to 12 parallel rows, spacing them 1/16 inch apart. Don't worry if your topstitching isn't perfect; the Chanel topstitching isn't either.

Grosgrain and plaited-yarn trims were often used to trim tweed fabric (bottom-right photo, facing page). The grosgrain-ribbon base frames the plaited yarns so that the trim is highlighted against the fabric. Use a steam iron to shape the grosgrain to fit curves. Imported grosgrain, marked by tiny scallops at the edges, is easier to shape than the straight-edge American grosgrain. Beginning at a side seam, sew the grosgrain to the garment by hand with small running stitches placed in the center of the ribbon. Miter the ribbon with a fold at the corners as needed. Narrow ribbons are easier to shape at curves and corners; you can use two ribbons placed side by side instead of a single wide ribbon.

To make the plaited strips, cut four to eight strands of yarn twice the finished length of the ribbon needed. Knot or sew the strands together at one end; pin the knotted end to your ironing board. Hold the strands taut while you plait. Secure the other end of the plaited strip with machine stitching. Center the plaited strip on the ribbon and sew it in place with hand running stitches.

A *selvage strip combined with a narrow woven band* (left photo, facing page) has in-seam buttonholes. You'll need a fabric selvage about 1 inch wide and a narrow, plain-woven band the same width. (Braided bands tend to ravel and flair at the cut edges.) Add a ¼-inch seam allowance to the finished selvage width, and cut the strip from the fabric. Cut the seam allowances on the jacket edges ¼ inch wide. With right sides together, hand-baste the selvage to the jacket, mitering the corners of the selvage when you reach a corner. Stitch, and then press the seams toward the jacket. Mark the buttonhole placement with a temporary marking pen. Butt one edge of the band to the selvage and sew them together by hand. Fasten the thread securely at the ends of each buttonhole. To finish the jacket, fold under the raw edges of the lining so that it covers the trimmed edges of the selvage. Slipstitch the lining in place.

Piping that is actually an extension of the edge-to-edge lining was used to trim many Chanel jackets. If there are buttonholes, finish them before proceeding with this trim.

Use a ¼-inch selvage strip cut from the lining fabric to stay the edges of the opening and neckline of the shell. Baste it to the wrong side where the finished edge of the jacket will be (drawing, facing page); use a small whipstitch to secure the outer edge permanently. Lightly catchstitch the inside edge of the strip.

Pin the shell and lining fabrics together at the edges. Trim the shell fabric so the seam allowances around the neck and opening are no more than ½ inch wide; trim the hem allowance to ⅜ inch. Trim the seam allowances on the lining fabric so they extend ½ inch beyond those of the shell fabric. (If you don't want piping, trim the lining even with the shell edges.) Baste the layers together about ¾ inch from the finished edges of the garment.

Fold under the seam allowances of the shell fabric. If necessary, miter the corners and trim away the excess seam allowances so that the edges are finished neatly. Baste ¼ inch from the folded edge; press. With the garment right side up, fold under the raw edges of the lining fabric so that the lining looks like a narrow piping and the folded edge extends ⅛ inch from the folded edge of the shell fabric; baste. Since the lining fabric is lightweight, you can fold the corners neatly without stitching miters. (If you don't want piping, fold the lining even with the edge.) Fell the shell fabric to the lining, making sure you catch both layers so the "piping" won't vary in width.

Making a Chanel button: Stitch a gold button in the center of a fabric circle, wrap the fabric around a curtain ring, and stitch the fabric closed.

Chanel buttons — Encircled by a ring of fabric, this novelty button is easy to duplicate (photo above), or you can have special buttons made by Fashion Touches (Box 804, Bridgeport, CT 06601; 203-333-7738).

To make your own buttons, first choose a small (⅜-inch to ½-inch) gold-colored button with a shank that will fit comfortably inside a plastic curtain ring. Cut a circle of shell fabric slightly more than twice the diameter of the curtain ring. Using an awl, work a hole into the center of the circle. Insert the button shank into the hole and sew the shell-fabric circle securely to the fabric. Place a row of gathering stitches around the edge of the circle; then place the ring on the wrong side of the circle, and pull the gathering stitches taut so that the button fits snugly inside the ring and the fabric fits smoothly over the ring. If you pull the stitches too tight, the button won't fit inside the ring. Flatten the raw edges on the back of the button by sewing back and forth over them several times. Cover the raw edges with a Circle of lining fabric. Sew the button to the garment with a thread shank. ❑

Claire Shaeffer, whose article, "Clothing Connections," appeared in Threads, *No. 22, p. 24, teaches clothing-construction techniques at College of the Desert in Palm Desert, CA. Her latest book on specialty fabrics is Claire Shaeffer's Fabric Sewing Guide (Chilton Book Co., 1989). Garments and details on pp. 48–50 are from the collection of The Edward C. Blum Design Laboratory at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, except where noted.*

Akira on Bias

Patterns and techniques from the mastermind behind Halston's evening wear

by Ann Hyde
(from issue #37)

Akira Maki arrived in New York in 1974, after three years of training with one of Japan's top designers, Mme. Minami, a specialist in the art of bias. Within two years, Akira was the guiding hand behind Halstons' bias-cut line, and soon became Halston's chief assistant designer for evening wear. On his own since 1981, Akira is still a champion of the bias cut, and his flowing gowns have adorned luminaries like Nancy Reagan, the Duchess of Marlborough, and Marilyn Quayle (whose inaugural gown he designed).

The Akira look is soft and feminine, full of gathers and diagonal draping, often presented in bold colors, but always in delicate and seductive fabrics. Nonetheless, Akira's view of design is far from romantic. He is a rationalist at heart, having learned from Mme. Minami that all dressmaking can be regarded as a problem in mathematics. For the curious admirer of his work, this is a boon, because Akira can always explain the evolution of his creations in the most logical manner. I recently got just such an explanation from him concerning one of his geometric approaches to designing on the bias (see the drawings on pp. 56 and 57).

Akira also loaned me a three-layer bias-cut chiffon dress from his current collection to copy and share with ***Threads*** readers; it's the dress in the photo on the facing page; the pattern is given on p. 54. Each layer of chiffon is a different color, shifting and swirling together as the wearer moves. I'll describe how to stay-stitch the layers together to control the ultralight chiffon while cutting out three layers simultaneously, how to cut bias tape and apply it smoothly to finish the armscye and neckline, how to cover cording with bias, and how to hem the garment without stretching the edges.

While I believe lightweight silk chiffon or georgette to be the most exciting fabric for this dress, other fabrics could be used effectively; lightweight crepes or sheers in silk, wool, cotton, or polyester will all work, and creped fabrics may be easier to handle. The effect will be different in each case, but the techniques described here will still apply.

I seriously recommend that you make a sample for each process described here. After all my years of sewing, that's still what I do. Besides providing practice for new techniques, samples are essential for fine-tuning your machine settings, choosing presser feet, threads, and so on, when you're working with a new fabric. Keep your samples for future reference in a notebook with plastic pockets; I make a sample more carefully if I plan to keep it. Try out each technique in fabrics of different weights, because observing the way each fabric behaves and looks when you're finished will make the process much more interesting and useful. I loosened my top tension and used 1.5mm stitches, a 65/9 needle, and silk thread with a regular presser foot.

Cutting out chiffon

To duplicate Akira's dress, I used 10 yards of 62-inch-wide black silk chiffon (chiffon usually comes in 60-inch and 44-inch widths). I separated the fabric into three equal pieces 3⅓ yards long by snipping through the selvage, then tearing across the fabric with a firm, quick snapping pull. To cut instead, snip the selvage and pull out a weft thread, then cut along the line where the thread was.

Laying out on grain—The three pieces of fabric are stacked and worked as a unit, which requires a big work surface; I used the floor. I pinned bed sheets to a firm, low-pile carpet, then carefully drew a rectangle 3⅓ yards by 62 inches on them. I used a straightedge and a draftsmen's triangle to make sure my lines were straight and the corners square.

To minimize distortion of the chiffon, make sure that its grainlines are precisely parallel to the sides of the rectangular work surface. The first step is to pin a selvage of one layer along one side of the marked work surface; pin the chiffon enough to discourage any tendency to move. If your selvages are more taut than the rest of the fabric, snip them every 8 to 12 inches. Gently stretch the other selvage to erase all wrinkles, and pin it down to the opposite side. Then pin down each end along the end lines of the work surface, making sure that the corners come out perfectly square.

Layering, thread tracing, and cutting—Pin the next two layers of fabric on top of the first, one at a time, using the same process. Lay the pattern on top of the final layer, making certain that the grainline on the pattern lies true to the grain of the material. Pin the pattern through all three layers of fabric, keeping the pins a little inside the edge of the pattern. Place the pins diagonal to the grainline, which will reduce distortion from them; for some reason, I seem to need fewer pins that way, as well.

Thread trace around the edge of the paper pattern, which is without seam allowances, by catching all layers with a ⅜-in. running stitch, as shown in the drawing on p. 55. This thread tracing will later become the stitching line, so make it very straight. Using your sharpest shears, cut through all three layers, cutting ½ inch (or ⅝ inch if you prefer) outside the tracing thread. Pause frequently to clean the blades. Don't hurry. Try to keep the fabric relaxed and flat while it is being cut. The result will be three perfectly cut layers, held together by the tracing thread and pinned to the pattern.

The fashion industry sometimes uses two sheets of pattern paper with the fabric sandwiched in between instead of thread tracing. An underlying sheet is laid down, then the layers of fabric are arranged and pinned as described. The uncut pattern sheet is then laid on top and pinned all around. The entire sandwich is cut as one, without thread tracings. You might try this if you decide to experiment further with layered chiffon. Once you're comfortable handling the chiffon, you'll find it more efficient.

Constructing the dress

Follow the steps given with the pattern on p. 54 to convert the cut layers into the garment. While working, handle the three layers as one unit, and keep the fabric lying as flat as possible on the work surface rather than being suspended, which could stretch it.

Cutting bias binding—As with many couture gowns, the raw edges of the dress are all bound with strips of well-stretched, self-fabric bias tape, except for the hem, as we'll see below. Make sure that the tape is cut exactly on the true bias, at 45 degrees to the selvage. If it's cut at any other angle, it will ripple when pulled. I use several methods to determine the proper angle.

If I'm working with uncut yardage, and I'm going to use the entire width of the fabric, I lay the fabric out perfectly square, then, working from a cross-grain end, I fold the raw edge to fall exactly along the selvage. This creates a 45-degree-angle fold, no matter what size the fabric. To cut shorter strips, especially from cut yardage, I measure from the selvage with a 45-degree triangle and a straightedge to find the bias. If a triangle is hard to come by, you can simply fold the short edge of a sheet of paper over to the long edge, just like with yardage, to create a 45-degree reference, and extend

Akira's one-piece bias gown is an inspiring challenge for adventurous sewers. It's made of three layers of silk chiffon cut and sewn as one. There's a complete pattern on p. 54. (Photo by Yvonne Taylor)

Akira's seamless chiffon dress

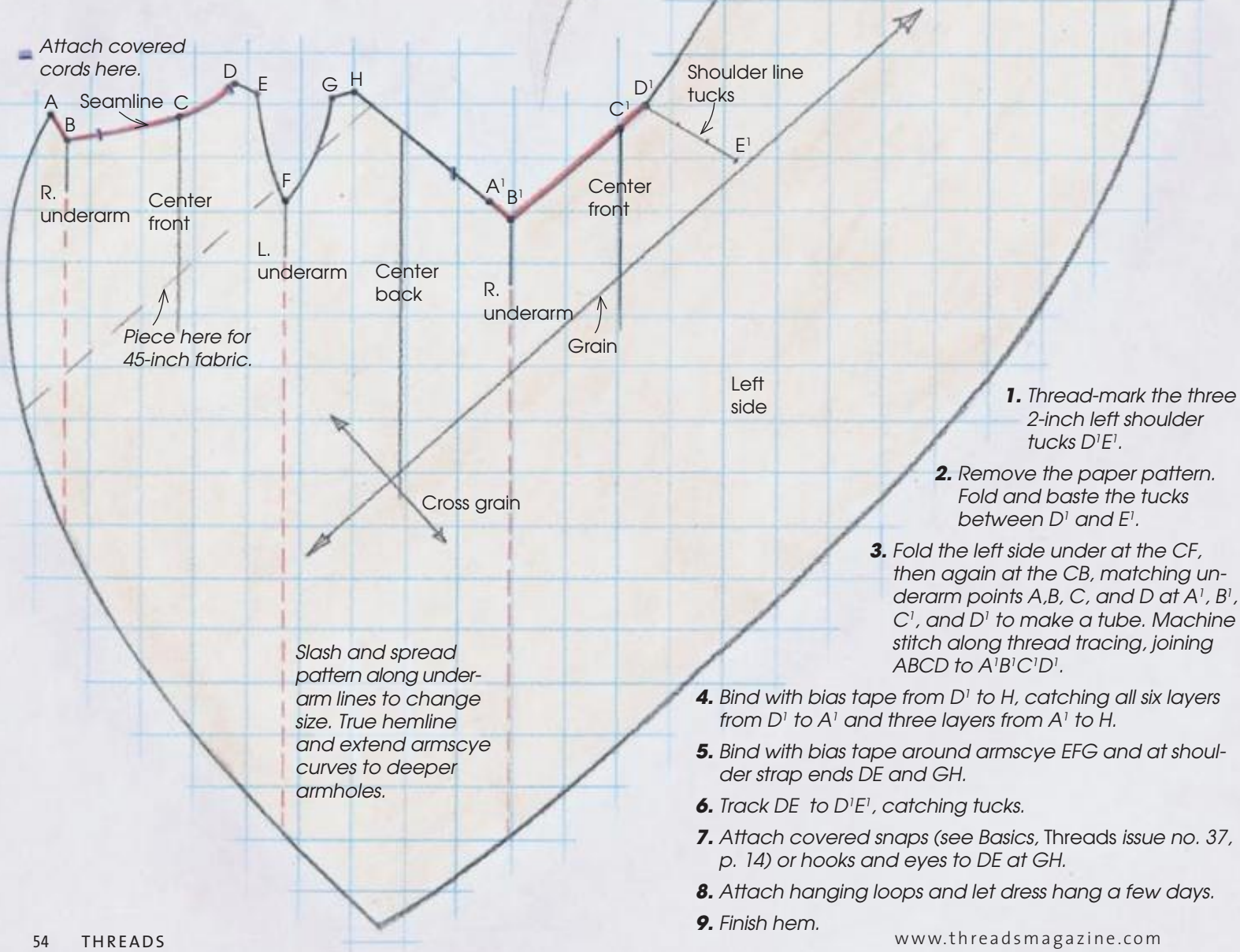
This one-piece gown is made from three layers of 45-inch-wide silk chiffon, each 3⅛ yards long. Akira cut each layer in a different color (orange over shades of yellow), so the overlaid layers create different color effects as the wearer moves. This pattern is a size 6, but it can easily be graded after scaling it up, by slashing along the underarm lines; add ¼ inch to each side of all slashes for each size, then tape the pattern back together. If you'd prefer to make the dress with a right shoulder strap, simply flip the pattern. Piece the fabric as shown, with plain seams, pressed open; the bottom layer's seam allowances should be facing up towards the top layers, whose seams should face down. Lay out, thread trace a seamline through all layers, and cut out as explained in the main article.

Construction steps

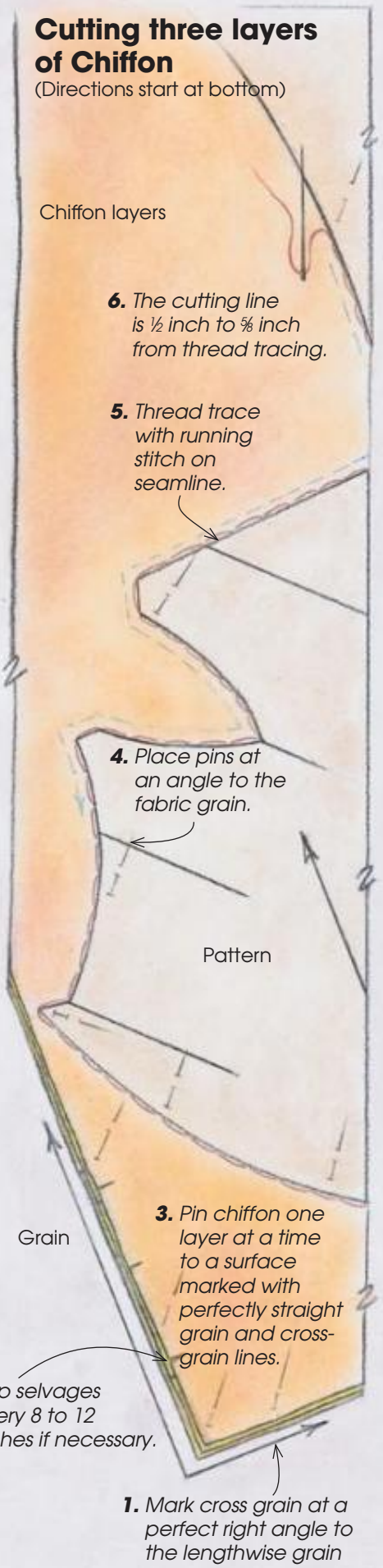
Use the alignment points in the pattern as you follow the steps at lower right. Finishing details are explained in the accompanying article.

How the dress wraps

When completed, the dress is a tube, snapping or hooking closed only at the shoulder.



1. *Thread-mark the three 2-inch left shoulder tucks D^1E^1.*
2. *Remove the paper pattern. Fold and baste the tucks between D^1 and E^1.*
3. *Fold the left side under at the CF, then again at the CB, matching underarm points A,B, C, and D at A^1, B^1, C^1, and D^1 to make a tube. Machine stitch along thread tracing, joining ABCD to $A^1B^1C^1D^1$.*
4. *Bind with bias tape from D^1 to H, catching all six layers from D^1 to A^1 and three layers from A^1 to H.*
5. *Bind with bias tape around armscye EFG and at shoulder strap ends DE and GH.*
6. *Track DE to D^1E^1, catching tucks.*
7. *Attach covered snaps (see Basics,* Threads *issue no. 37, p. 14) or hooks and eyes to DE at GH.*
8. *Attach hanging loops and let dress hang a few days.*
9. *Finish hem.*


Cutting three layers of Chiffon
(Directions start at bottom)
Chiffon layers
6. The cutting line is ½ inch to ⅝ inch from thread tracing.
5. Thread trace with running stitch on seamline.
4. Place pins at an angle to the fabric grain.
Pattern
Grain
3. Pin chiffon one layer at a time to a surface marked with perfectly straight grain and cross-grain lines.
2. Snip selvages every 8 to 12 inches if necessary.
1. Mark cross grain at a perfect right angle to the lengthwise grain

Bias-covered cords are sewn to the inside, distributing the weight evenly when the garment is hung for storage. The bias-covered edge has been folded completely to the inside. The hems (far right) of this sample garment were machine rolled.

the line with the straightedge. Either way, I cut along the folded or marked line, then continue to cut as many strips as I need by cutting parallel to the first cut. You measure the width of the strip at right angles to the cut edge, not parallel to the grain of the fabric.

For Akira's dress, if you cut strips equal to twice the length of the neck and armscye seams, you'll have enough to make bias tubing for the hanging loops described below. I cut strips 2 inches wide, folded them in half, stretched them taut, and pressed; the finished strip was about ½ inch wide. After cutting out the pattern, you should have big enough scraps left to cut plenty of bias from outside the curved areas on the pattern. I found I didn't need to piece the strips to cover the short sections that needed binding.

Applying the binding—On Akira's dress, you'll have three-layer and six-layer edges to cover. The former will be thread traced together, and the latter will be machine seamed right next to the thread tracing (which is then removed), in both cases at ½ to ⅝ inch from the raw edge; the binding method is the same for both. Place the prestretched tape on the right side of the garment seam, raw edges together, but with the tape edges just ⅛ inch over the stitching line. Sew the strip to the fabric just to the garment side of the existing stitching, and trim the seam allowances evenly to about ⅛ inch or less.

To make absolutely sure the tape isn't stretched or distorted, you can baste or pin it in place before either the machine stitching or the hand stitching steps to come. Baste with a white silk thread so it will leave no marks in the garment.

At this point you have two choices. You'll be folding the tape to the wrong side, but you can either fold it entirely out of sight, folding along the stitching line, or you can fold it over the raw edge, leaving a strip of the tape visible on the right side, the width of the seam allowance underneath. The tape on Akira's dress was folded out of sight, as you can see in the photo above; because the chiffon is so thin, he didn't worry about the turn of the cloth distorting the chiffon layers. Both treatments can look good, as long as the tape lays flat and, if visible, is a consistent width. In either case, the folded edge is slip-stitched (see *Basics, Threads* issue no. 37, p. 14) to the wrong side. If the strip is showing on the front, the stitches on the back should be made inside the machine seamline, out of sight. For the most invisible slip stitching, sew with lengths of thread pulled from a lengthwise raw edge of the fabric.

Covered cording—Akira's dress is hung for storage from bias-covered cords attached as shown in the photo above and in the pattern on the facing page. They're easy to make; you can use the same bias strips you cut for the binding. Trim the strips to 1 inch wide and fold them in half, right side in, a little longer than you need. Cut cording (use whatever works; I used sport-weight knitting wool) twice as long as you need and line it up inside the fold with raw ends matching, then sew along the cording with a zipper foot. Just before the end of the tape, which should be at the midpoint of the cord, pivot and stitch across the cord, catching it to the folded tape. Roll the bias back on itself, pulling out and exposing the first half of the cord and covering the other half with right-side-out fabric.

Rolling the hems

Before finishing the hem of his bias dresses, Akira hangs them from cords for at least three days to allow the bias fabric to assume its natural shape. Then he carefully hand rolls the hems, even those as long as on this dress: Counting all three layers, the hem is 22 yards long.

If it's beautifully done, there's no finish more elegant, but the best method for the home sewer is the one she can do most accurately. You've got three main choices: You can hand roll, use a rolled hemming attachment and do it entirely by machine, or roll it by hand with a little assistance from your machine. I tested all three with my fabric, and I got the best results with the last method. Here's how I did it:

With short stitches and a slightly loosened tension, I machine stitched along each hem, ⅛ inch below the marked hemline, which should be at least ½ inch from the raw edge. Then I trimmed the edge to ⅛ inch below the stitching. On some machines you may need to attach a top- or even-feed attachment to prevent the fabric from stretching. Test carefully, because a stretched, lettuce-edged hem will result in a much less elegant garment. It's also important not to let the weight of the garment drag on the hem as you stitch; support it carefully on your sewing table.

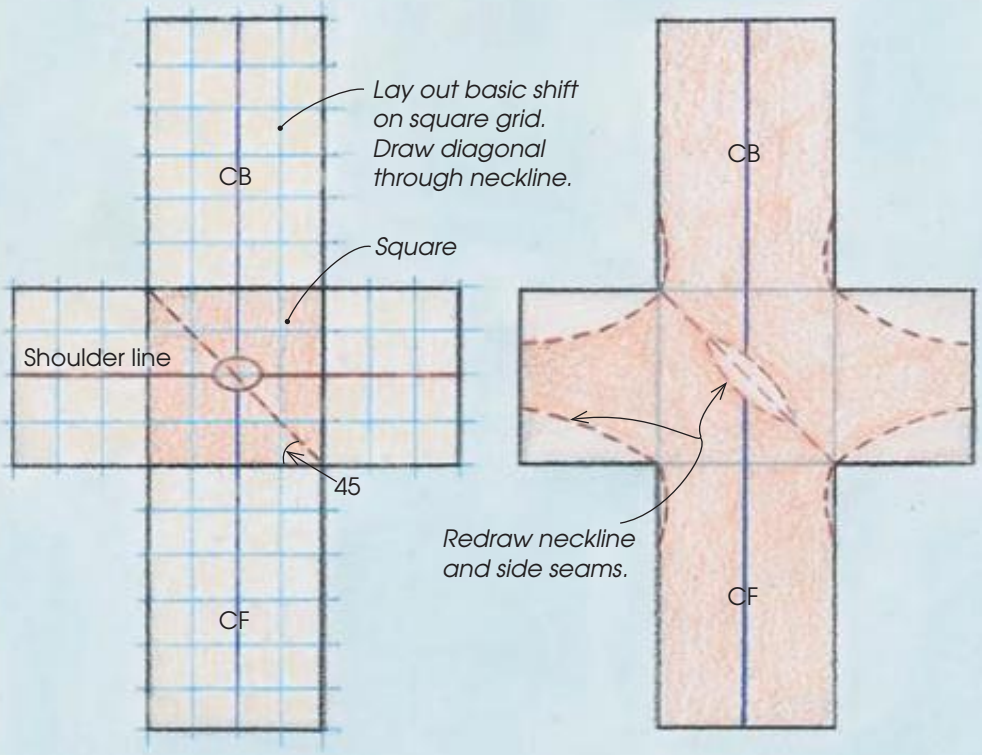
When the hem was trimmed, I hand rolled the raw edge over the machine stitching, which kept the edge from stretching and gave me a guideline and a bit of bulk to roll against. I rolled the edge between my thumb and forefinger, rolling to the wrong side just enough to cover the machine-stitched line. Using a thread from the fabric as described above, I slip-stitched, taking a small stitch through the fold in the roll. I caught a thread or two in the garment, pulling the thread loosely so as not to distort the edge. (See ***Threads***, No. 33, pp. 42-45 for more on rolled hems.)

If you plan to machine roll the hem, as in the sample garment shown on p. 55, try straight-stitching just below the hemline first. Some people find they get better results on bias edges that way. Other options include using the rolled edge attachment of your serger, or finding a small dressmaking shop that will finish the hem for you, either by hand or with professional equipment.

Ann Hyde is the director of the Ann Hyde Institute of Design, in Denver, CO, which holds regular summer workshops on couture sewing and fitting. She wrote about Armani jackets in* Threads*, No. 30.

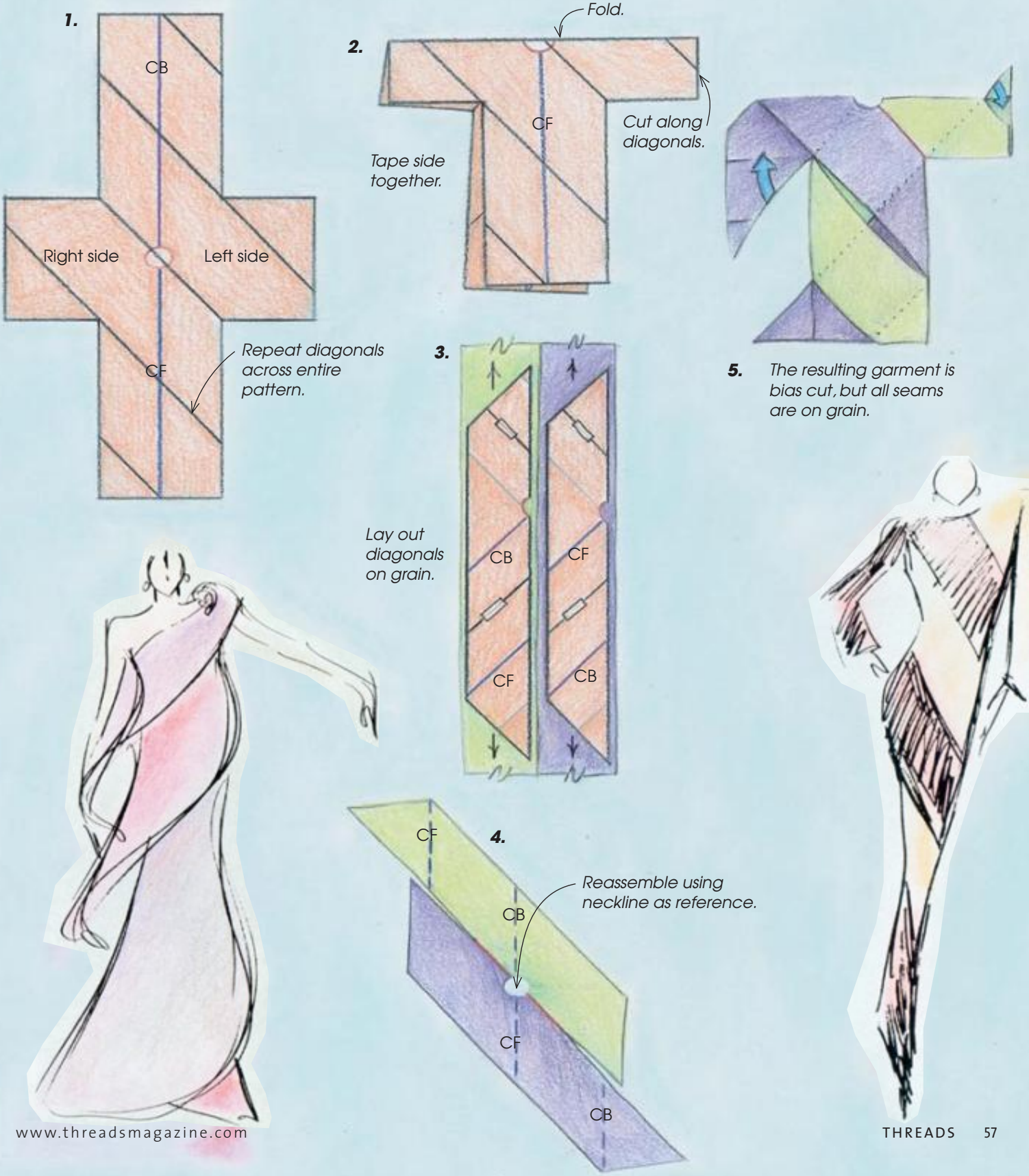
Akira's Basic Shift

Working from what he calls mankind's most basic garment shape, the one-piece shift with a simple neckline opening, Akira demonstrated how he developed the design of an asymmetrical bias-cut Halston dress now in the costume collection at the Metropolitan Museum in New York. The pattern starts with a perfect square whose side equals the shoulder or hip width, or whatever you choose. (See sketch blow.)



The spiral version

Further elaborations led Akira to the spiral version, shown here, which still serves as the basis for current and potential designs, like those in Akira's fashion drawings below. By allowing the bias shift to shape itself to the body underneath—aided by occasional subtle side seam and sleeve shaping and perfected by draping the basic on a dress form or live model—an endless variety of silhouettes is possible. Both the basic and the spiral designs permit very economical layout of normally inefficient bias garments.



Armani Jackets: The Inside Story

The state of the art in interfacings, shoulders pads, and set-in sleeves

by Marcy Tilton

(from issue #83)

Just as contemporary chefs are lightening up classic recipes, modern couture's most celebrated tailor, Giorgio Armani, is continually reinventing the traditional techniques of his craft. I've closely examined Armani jackets over the years, and I've discovered many techniques that we home sewers can adapt. In *Threads* issue no. 82, pp. 30-35, I explored a few current Armani styles that could be emulated with commercial patterns. But virtually all of my favorite Armani-inspired construction techniques can be applied to any jacket pattern you think worthy of a technical upgrade.

In this article, I'll describe interfacing approaches for the entire jacket and then go layer by layer through an Armani shoulder and sleeve structure. Combined with your usual techniques in the rest of the jacket, these methods represent a good starting place for any modern tailoring project. Feel free to borrow, adapt, and rethink them in the best tradition of Armani and his countless imitators. And I encourage you to take any opportunity that presents itself to examine and appreciate a real Armani garment. In an upcoming article, I'll focus on design details and finishing techniques I've gleaned from studying recent Armani creations.

Fusibles: what goes where

A typical Armani jacket incorporates several kinds of mostly fusible interfacing, along with cotton twill tape, bias and straight-grain strips of rayon lining fabric, and cotton broadcloth, that serve as reinforcements and stabilizers. Listed below are Armani's usual placements for interfacings (see also the drawings on pp. 60–61) with suggestions for widely available varieties:

The entire ***jacket front*** is fused, whether or not it has a collar. The interfacing extends into the seam allowances. My interfacing choices for the jacket front include Satin Weave, Textured Weft, Flex Weave, and SofKnit, all distributed by HTC. Satin Weave, which looks like the interfacing used in Armani jackets, is designed for lightly structured tailored garments; it works well with crepes or spongy textures and adheres to gabardines without bubbling. Textured Weft is soft and spongy with drape and give. It adds substance with drape and will not flatten fabrics with texture. Flex Weave, which also resembles the interfacing used by Armani, is soft, drapey, and flexible. SofKnit is a lightweight, all-bias fusible tricot. I used it on the jacket shown at right. I'll call this body-weight interfacing—whatever type you choose.

As I'll describe below, I use an interfacing method on notched and shawl ***lapels*** that's not derived from an Armani technique, but it works well to add (and keep) a bit of soft shaping to the roll of a lapel. Called a lapel wedge, it gently forces the lapel to roll back smoothly and curve inward at the lapel point. I trace the shape from the pattern in the lapel area, between the roll line and the seam allowances, as you can see in the drawing above. Use a lighter interfacing than your body-weight choice, such as So Sheer, Flex Weave, or Fusi-Knit, and cut the lengthwise grain along the roll line to stabilize it.

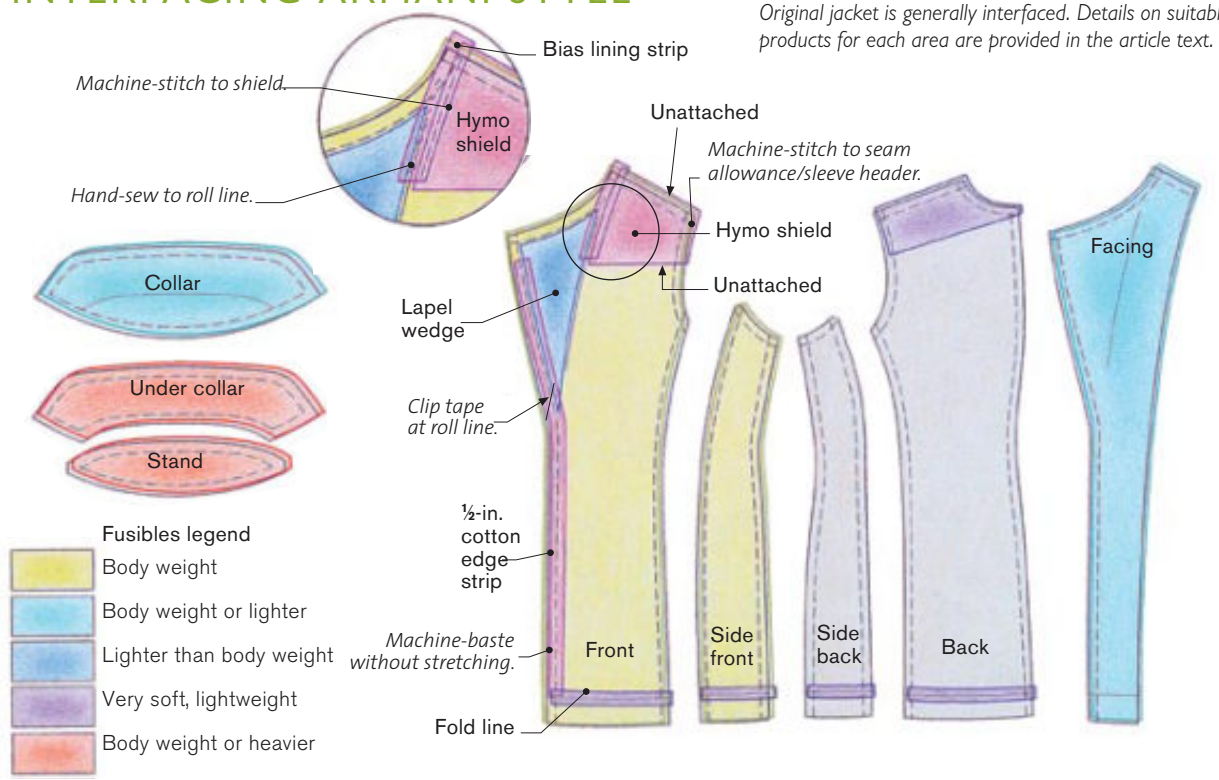
If the ***side panel*** only extends to the side seam, interface the entire piece as you did the front. If the

Model photo: Jack Deutsch; hair and makeup: Michelle Burnstein

Armani's results using home-sewing interfacings? Sure. *There's not much difference between what sewers can get and what's used in the factories; the key is knowing how to apply it and where.*

INTERFACING ARMANI-STYLE

Here's a typical jacket pattern, showing where an Armani Original jacket is generally interfaced. Details on suitable products for each area are provided in the article text.



side panel eliminates a side seam and extends to the back, interface 4 to 6 in. below the armscye with the same interfacing used for the front.

The ***facings*** and ***upper collar*** are fused with the same interfacing, which can be body weight or lighter. For instance, use Satin Weave for the garment front and SofKnit for facings and upper collar.

Armani uses a separate stand and collar for his ***under collars***, as shown, and described in detail in *Threads*, No. 82, p. 33. Interface the under collar on the bias, with the stand on the straight grain. Use body-weight interfacing or heavier. For instance, if you interfaced the jacket front, facings, and upper collar with SofKnit, choose Satin Weave, Textured Weft or Flex Weave for the under collar and stand.

On the ***back***, Armani uses a lightweight pellon-like fusible to balance the weight of the front and camouflage the shoulder pad. To get similar results, use a lightweight interfacing that does not leave a ridge. Pellon's Sof-Shape works well here; it's soft and blends with the fabric, adding no bulk. Cut the interfacing on the same grain as the jacket.

Interface ***hems*** at front, back, side, back/side panel, and sleeves using a 2-inch-wide strip of light interfacing like Sof-Shape or SofKnit, cut on the crossgrain. Position the strips so ½ inch extends beyond the hem fold, forming a soft edge.

One of the inner secrets of the fabulous look of an Armani sleeve is his brilliant take on a sleeve header. This shaped piece of light quilting fleece, shown in the top left photo on p. 62, fills in the seam allowance, supports the sleeve, and camouflages the shoulder pad. The header/support is cut 2¼ inches wide in the shape of the sleeve cap, following the ease points shown in the drawing on the facing page and explained below.

I'll also describe the front shield piece in detail below; like the sleeve header, it's a nonfusible. I use a supple woven hymo or hair canvas, which can be cut on the straight grain or on the bias if the hymo seems stiff, softening the effect and allowing the shield to meld with the drape of the fabric.

Fusing tips

Preshrink the interfacing before fusing to prevent the front from shrinking by dipping it into hot tap water and hanging it to air-dry. You can also position the interfacing on the fashion fabric and steam it before fusing, holding the iron 1 to 2 inches above; the interfacing will visibly grow smaller.

Armani uses many different interfacings on his garments, so you'll want to have a selection on hand to consider, too. After the jacket is cut, assemble your scraps to test which interfacing is best for your

Drawings: Karen Meyer

fabric. Using a press cloth, test each interfacing for temperature, steam, and timing. I also check the drape and whether the interfacing adds thickness or shows a ridge.

Fuse carefully and completely. I get the best results using a press. With an iron, fuse from the center, fanning outward, overlapping the iron. Keep the iron moving using a lifting movement.

The lapel wedge

This technique originated with a Los Angeles tailor who specializes in making elegant custom suits for women, and it beautifully replicates the soft rolled lapel achieved by hours of hand pad stitching. Mark rows ¼ inch apart and parallel to the roll line on the lapel interfacing, using an air-erasable dressmaker's pen or lightly with a soft lead pencil. Fuse one row at a time, starting at the roll line, pressing over the edge of a sleeve board to build in a curved shape, as shown at top right on p. 62. When finished, set the lapel roll with a blast of steam and let it air-dry. The straight-grain edge on the lapel wedge stabilizes the roll line.

Stabilize the front edges

To help create a flat, stable front edge, Armani jacket fronts usually have a ½-inch strip of lightweight, firmly woven, straight-grain cotton fabric (not tape) caught in the seam as the front edge is sewn. Machine-baste the strip so it's centered over the seamline, stitching just to the outside of the seam, without stretching. Catch the strip in the seam as the facing is attached. On notched-collar jackets, apply the strip along the front edge, ending 1 inch from the top corner (see the drawing on the facing page). Clip the strip at the roll line so that it can turn. On collarless jackets, staystitch the jacket neck edges first, and stabilize the back neck separately by basting ¼-inch cotton twill tape in the seam. Tape the fronts from shoulder to hem, all before attaching the shield, but after fusing the lapel wedge, if there is one.

Of sleeves and shoulders

There are two trademarks of an Armani sleeve: first, no ease across the top of the sleeve for 2 inch either side of the shoulder seam (this is why I indicated specific ease points earlier on), and second, in this uneased area, the sleeve/body seam is pressed open. Together these innovations make a smooth, natural sleeve silhouette. Armani uses a ½-inch seam allowance on his sleeves, and I heartily recommend that you do the same. A narrower seam makes a big difference when easing, and ½ inch is wide enough to support the sleeve cap.

The first step is to tape the armhole in the seam allowance. Use cotton or cotton/linen tailor's tape, ¼ inch wide. Press the tape in a curve to build in the shape of the armhole before stitching. Stitch the tape ¼ inch from the edge, from the top ease point in front, under the armhole, to the top ease point in back. Pull slightly as you sew, as shown in the center left photo on p. 62, using a light touch. The purpose is to draw up the body of the garment very slightly so it hugs the figure.

Stitch a ½-inch strip of cotton broadcloth across the top of the sleeve in the same line of stitching as the tape, just covering the tape ends (see the bottom right photo on p. 62). This creates a light padding at the cap of the sleeve.

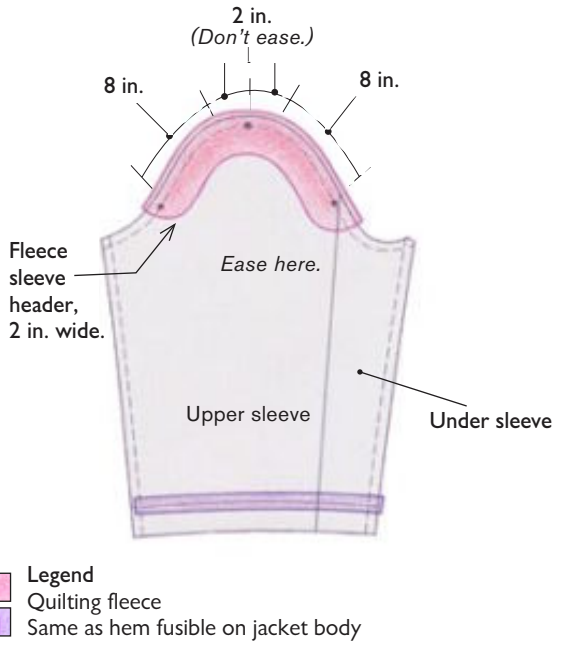
Next ease-stitch the sleeve cap using three rows of machine basting, two close together inside the seamline and a third row a fat ⅛ inch outside the seamline, between each pair of ease points. Pin in the sleeve, matching at the shoulder, ease points, and underarm. The outside basting line will give you much more control as you distribute the ease. Wrap threads around the pin at one ease point at the start, and at the other point to secure.

As you stitch the sleeve in place, be sure to stitch with the garment uppermost for approximately 4 inches across the top of the sleeve from front to back ease points. Then switch to stitching with the sleeve side up around the rest of the sleeve. This is an old tailor's trick that helps ensure a perfectly straight stitch along the top of the armhole.

Press next. This is the secret to getting your sleeve to sing. I'm sure that in the factory, there are special pressing devices to yield a flawless sleeve cap quickly and easily. At home, a ham, sleeve board, clapper, iron, perseverance, and ingenuity are essential tools. Start by pressing flat around the seam allowances, as it was sewn. With some fabrics, this sets the ease and not much more pressing is necessary. Clip the

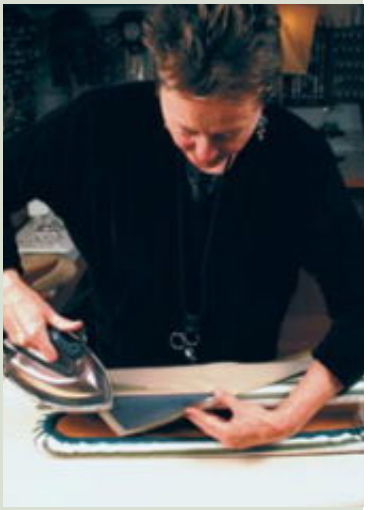
TO EASE THE SLEEVE AND MAKE THE HEADER

Align your two-piece sleeve pattern at the sleeve cap, and then mark as shown to establish ease points. Before separating, trace off the shape of the sleeve header to encompass the ease points.



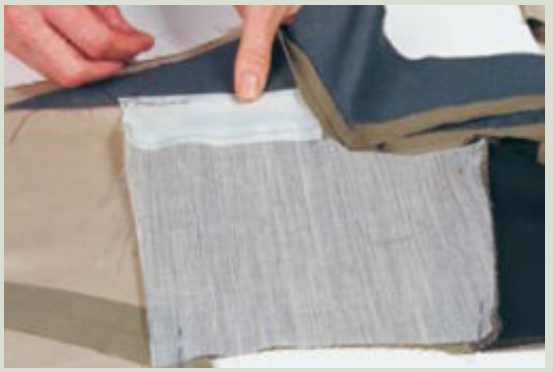
Construction tips

The sleeve header is made from ordinary polyester fleece (left). The pattern comes from tracing the cap of your sleeve pattern. Shape your lapels (right) with a clever pressing technique: Let the lapel fall off the pressing surface, and fuse the interfacing to it in narrow sections as you move it back to the flat surface, forcing it to roll.



For the most natural shoulder/sleeve silhouette, press the armhole seam allowances open about 4 inches at the shoulder seam.

Support and shape the armhole with ¼-inch tape, stretched slightly as it's applied, as shown at left. Add a strip of ½-inch cotton at the cap (black strip at right) to pad the shoulder seam overlapping it on the ¼-inch tape at the ease points.



Shape the shoulder with a free-floating canvas panel called a shield, made from traditional, nonfusible hair canvas or hymo, and secured only at the roll line with hand stitches, as shown, and machine-stitched at the armhole seam allowance when the sleeve header is attached.

armhole at the top ease points, and press open this 4 inches at the top of the sleeve. Fuss as needed to get the sleeve to look flawless.

Adding the shield and sleeve header

Once you've set in the sleeve, you're ready to apply Armani's signature shoulder shaper, the shield. The shield shape is shown in the bottom photo at left. Armani uses a generic woven hymo cut on the straight of grain. I prefer a super lightweight hair canvas cut on the bias. I insert the shield and the sleeve header—which fills in the sleeve cap—at the same time after the sleeve is sewn and pressed.

The shield is cut following the jacket front pattern in the shoulder area, including seam allowances at the armhole and shoulder edges. If your pattern has a dart in the upper front where the shield will go, make a duplicate pattern of the shield area, and pleat out the dart to make the shield pattern. Lay the shield pattern piece over the original front, and mark ½ inch from roll line or front edge. Transfer the grainline to a new piece, or adapt it to the bias if desired.

The shield's outer edge is attached to the front at the armhole seam allowance at the same time that the sleeve header is joined to the seam allowances on the sleeve side. At the shield's front/roll-line edge, lap a 1¼-inch strip of bias rayon lining and straight-stitch it to the shield at ⅞ inch. Trim the hair canvas at ¾ inch, so only the lining layer is caught in the seam. Then stitch the other edge of the lining fabric to the roll line by hand, as shown in the photo at left. On collarless jackets, cut the lining strip the same grain and shape as the front, and stitch as you sew the facing. Neither

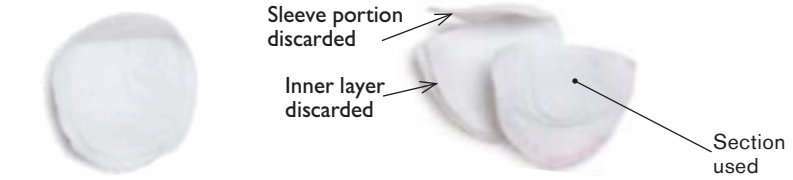
Photos this page: David Page Coffin

Mimic an Armani shoulder pad by making your own

I couldn't find a commercial shoulder pad that mimicked the Armani original, so I made one. I used parts from commercially available pads, similar, I'm sure, to ones you can find at any good notions source (like the mail-order sources below). The resulting pad is softer and thinner than pad 1 and more substantial than pad 2.

Starting materials

Pad 1
"Glory," raglan type, from Britex

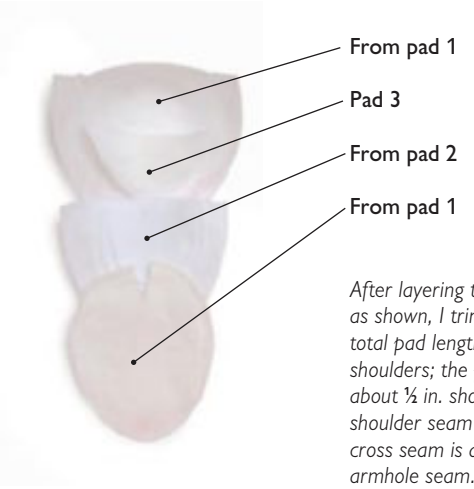


Pad 2
Set-in type, ½ inch thick, from Britex

Pad 3
Set-in type, ⅜ inch thick, from The Sewing Workshop

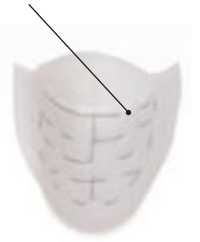
I removed and discarded the two inner layers from pad 1 and the bottom layer and sleeve portion of pad 2, as shown. I used pad 3 as is.

To create a pad



Finished pad

Cross seam



After layering the pads, as shown, I trimmed the total pad length to fit my shoulders; the pad should be about ½ in. shorter than the shoulder seam when the pad's cross seam is aligned with the armhole seam. Be sure each underlayer is graded so it's ½ inch shorter than the layer above it.
Using a doubled thread, stab-stitch through all pad layers, shaping the pad as you stitch across the pad in both directions. Don't pull the stitches tight, keep the pad smooth, and finally, fold it in half when done. Then steam it to make it hold its shape. Install as described in the text below.

—M.T.

Photos this page: Sloan Howard

the shoulder seam nor the lower edge on the shield is stitched; the shield floats, held in place only at the front edge and armhole.

On the Armani jacket I examined, the shield and header were machine sewn to the armhole seam allowances. I tried both hand-sewing and machine-stitching very carefully along the first stitching line, and I had better results with machine stitching. Stretch the fleece header and the shield slightly in the direction it will lay, so the armhole cups and keeps its shape. Press again; this is the final sleeve pressing.

Making your own shoulder pads

The Armani shoulder pad is as distinctive as the rest of his garments, and I've never seen anything exactly like it for sale to sewers. I combined several commercial shoulder pads as shown in the photos above to get the effect I wanted: an invisible support for the sleeve that adds height and fills in the sleeve cap.

Once it's made, hand-stitch the crosswise seam of the pad to the armhole seam allowance for about 4 inches at the top of the sleeve. The back edge of the pad is also stitched with a few machine stitches to the seam allowance on the facing after the lining is sewn. At the neck edge, the pad is joined to the seam allowance of the shoulder seam with a ½-inch by 2-inch strip of lining and a few machine stitches. This provides a bit of play while holding it securely, without interfering with the movement of the shield. Like most of Armani's construction ideas, it's ingenious and quite copy-able. ♦

Marcy Tilton wrote about Armani's pattern-making in Threads *No. 82.*

SHOULDER PAD SOURCES

Britex
146 Geary St.
San Francisco, CA 94108
415-392-2910

The Sewing Workshop
1250 Oakley
Topeka, KS 66604
800-466-1599

How Madame Grès Sculpts with Fabric

Her simple shapes, bias-draped and pleated, have made her the grande dame of elegance

by Arlene Cooper (from issue #10)

The couture salon of Alix Grès is located in a lovely old Parisian building on the rue de la Paix, overlooking the Place Vendôme. I enter Maison Grès from an elevator off a courtyard. All is white, serene, austere, elegant, with high ceilings and large windows. The elevator is flanked by niches into which life-sized classical sculptures of women have been set. I wait on a white leather sofa for Madame Grès to descend from the atelier. She has the walk and carriage of a middle-aged woman, and while she is inches shorter than my own 5 feet 2½ inches, she conveys none of the frailty one reads about. Her face is lively, her eyes really wonderful. She is wearing her usual turban and an angora-jersey skirt and sweater over a cashmere turtleneck. Her voice is full, rather low. As she enters the room, she issues a reminder: She has only 15 minutes to spare before meeting a client. She doesn't make herself comfortable when she sits down to my right, on the edge of the sofa. In 19 minutes, she'll be gone, murmuring regrets.

I have traveled to wintry Paris in April, having submitted in advance the questions I intend to ask Madame Grès. A shy and fiercely private person, her aversion to interviews is well known. Forewarned of the brevity of the interview, I dare ask only about her design process and how she works with fabric. Her desire to accommodate me is evident in her answers.

Madame Grès's fame rests mainly on the draped and pleated silk-jersey or chiffon evening gowns in the classical mode that she has been creating for over 50 years. Her work is known for its prodigious use of luxury fabrics in a personal method that is both time- and labor-intensive and virtually impossible to copy, but her work provides inspiration for anyone who makes clothes and loves fabric.

Her career—Madame Grès was born to a bourgeois Parisian family. Her father was an industrialist named Barton. (Both *Alix* and *Grès* are assumed names; *Alix* was invented to replace a detested first name and years later *Grès* was borrowed from her husband—an anagram for his given name, which he used for his work as a sculptor.) She was brought up strictly and as a child was taught dance, music, and art, especially sculpture. She dreamed of becoming a sculptress, but that was not considered proper for a girl at that time, so she turned to making what she called "living sculptures" and thus started dressmaking, she says, "without knowing it." The improvisational nature that characterizes so much of Madame Grès's work thus had early roots.

She began watching and emulating the work of a family friend who was employed at a fashion house. After sketching and studying cutting for three months, Madame Grès began making toiles (draped and sewn fabric patterns) to earn her living. Because of her original, sculptural approach, her designs sold very well. Encouraged by a well-connected friend of the family, she showed the toiles to the Commissionaires of the Chambre Syndicale, and although she burst into tears of nervousness before them, they were impressed enough to permit her to establish herself as a couturière.

In 1934, with the same family friend as a business partner, she opened Alix Barton Couture at 83, rue de Faubourg St. Honoré. Her work was greeted with enthusiasm. The March 1934 issue of Paris Vogue carried an advertisement announcing the opening, and in May *L'Art et la Mode* featured an Alix gown and evening coat on its cover. The first collections consisted of daywear and satin or brocade evening gowns. It was not until her third collection, when Madame Grès had been inspired by the beauty of a silk-jersey fabric she had ordered, that the draped and pleated evening gowns for which she is best known first appeared.

Her unique approach to dressmaking led to meteoric success. Her innovations produced clothes of exceptional beauty, prized for their sumptuous fabrics, their good taste and originality, their great simplicity, and their enhancement of the wearer. "No woman is physically perfect," she says, "nor is she perfectly hopeless. Each has her own share of beauty.... I like to make a body look beautiful, to enhance its qualities, to make a waist look thinner, a bust higher; I want people to guess about the shape underneath." Small wonder that her designs were sought by wealthy, fashionable women.

In 1941 she left Maison Alix and fled wartime Paris with her infant daughter. When she returned in 1942, she was persuaded by Lucien Lelong, then president of the Chambre Syndicale, to open her own couture house. Maison Grès opened at 1, rue de la Paix, and Madame Grès's 1942 collection was in the French national colors: red, white, and blue. It was closed by the Germans for a time during World War II, but Maison Grès is still at the rue de la Paix address (although her July 1986 collection was shown at the Jacques Esterel showroom on rue de Faubourg St. Honorè).

Today, as 50 years ago, Alix Grès herself produces her couture collections. It is she who works with the fabric manufacturers. At the beginning of each season they bring samples of their new collections to her and she selects what she likes. She is then presented with books of samples, from which she narrows down her choices, and the fabrics are delivered to the workroom. It is she who decides what the collection will include—a process of inspiration rather than of planning; she who drapes the fabric on live models, makes the toiles, and supervises the workroom staff and fittings. And it is she who travels with the collection to New York and Tokyo to ensure that her devoted clients have access to her clothes.

Madame Grès's contribution to *haute couture* is a legacy of timeless clothes. What every sewer can learn from her is an awareness of the special qualities of each fabric, plus a willingness to experiment and use fabric in unconventional ways that enhance its essence. One need not be an expert dressmaker; a beginner may

improvise too, as Madame Grès herself suggests. "What I was doing was new," she told Ingrid Bleichroeder in an interview. "I didn't know the *mètier*—sewing, cutting. Ignorance is a very important thing—it has purity and innocence. It leads you to try things that others wouldn't dare attempt. In the beginning there were minor inconveniences: The dress would look *magnifique*, but I wouldn't know if the poor lady would be able to lift an arm or sit down all evening."

Her approach—Alix Grès's passion for fabric and her aversion to cutting it are as central to her work as is her background as a sculptress. In an interview with Ben Brantley (*Women's Wear Daily*, November 7, 1979), she said: "From the beginning I didn't want to do what others were doing in any way; I wasn't able to because I didn't have the knowledge. That was one reason I took the material and worked directly on it. I used the knowledge I had, which was sculpture." Although he considers essential the presence of a live model on whom to drape, while in the mountains during the war, she made her own dummies with hay, some wood, and a tin. She bought fabric from the market and continued to drape clothes.

She told Bleichroeder: "By touching a piece of fabric ..., it is possible to know its soul, its character. While I drape a mannequin with silk, it reacts between my hands, and I try to understand and judge its reactions. Thus, I give a dress I create the line and form the fabric itself wishes to take. ... By touching it [the fabric], I know what I am doing, but I can't make it do what it doesn't want to do. There is a complicity, like a perfect marriage."

Madame Grès speaks with great pleasure of the extraordinary fabrics that used to be made in Europe. In 1938, for instance, Bianchini produced a gold-and-silver silk lamé with Persian miniatures at the rate of a few inches per day. When *haute couture* was very important, she says, the fabrics were exclusive to each house, but now only the manufacturers of ready-to-wear clothes command enough yardage to justify the production of exclusives.

An extra-wide silk jersey became known as "Alix jersey" in honor of Madame Grès because she was the first to use it for dresses rather than underwear and because she was instrumental in its development. Madame Grès told me that both Monsieur Calcombet and Monsieur Rodier, jersey manufacturers, used to tease her during the height of her popularity by asserting that she used enough jersey to surround

Here, in one of her more formal, close-fitting garments, which she made in the 50s, Madame Grès has draped and puffed taffeta to create a cocktail dress that she calls "paper taffeta." Photo courtesy of **L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode.**

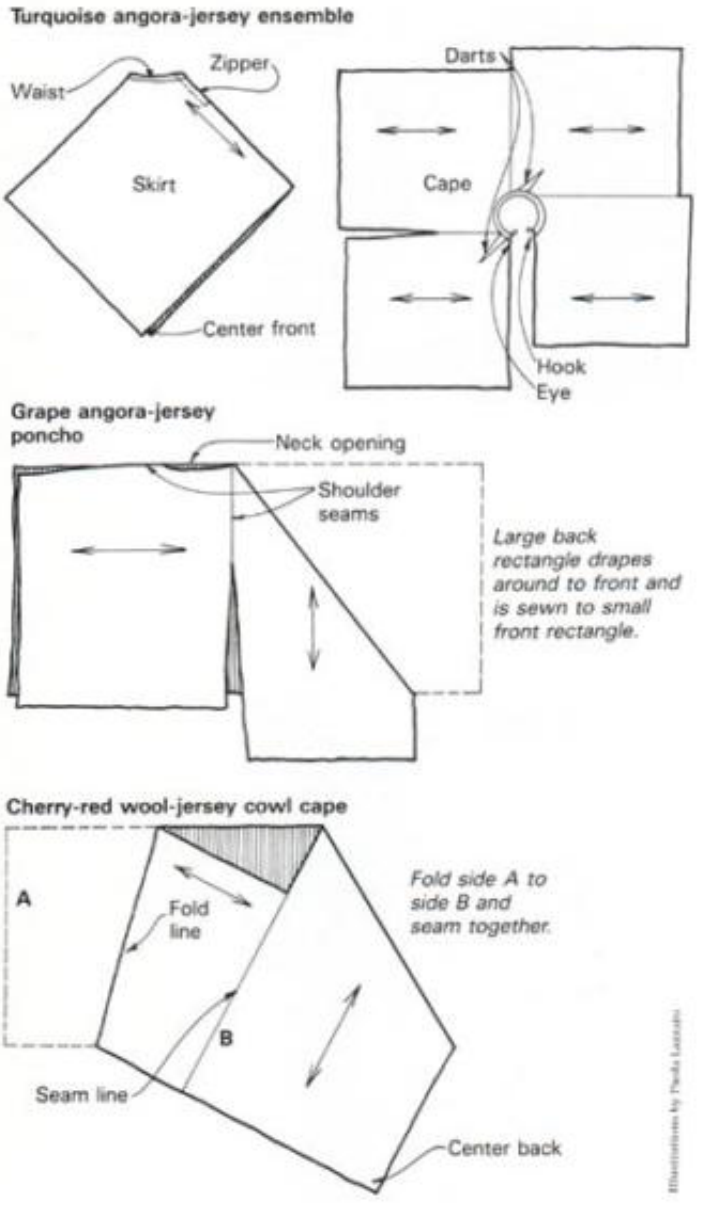
the world. Later she would be equally innovative in her use of faille, taffeta (which she draped and puffed), and djersakasha, a cashmere jersey, which was the predecessor of angora jersey. Djersakasha was woven as a tube, so Madame Grès could use it without seams.

Before it becomes a Grès design, fabric is draped into pleats, folds, or smooth areas and then stitched into place, usually with X-like tacking stitches. Only then is it cut. "The cutting process is all-important," Madame Grès says. "When preparing a collection, I always use up three pairs of scissors." Ordinarily, the entire process is executed first on a toile Madame Grès makes herself, which is then fitted and pinned on a mannequin. Madame Grès is unique in her limiting of the number of seams. "I have always respected the body structure and the natural movement of a given material. I limit the number of seams in order to give a better impression of freedom, of suppleness of the silhouette."

The next step is fitting the garment fabric itself on a live model. Then the piece is sent to the appropriate workshop for assembly and finish sewing: one for tailored clothes like coats and suits, two others (called the "soft" workshops for dresses, evening gowns, and so forth.

Her designs and constructions—The technique of constructing clothes with pieces cut on the bias was devised by Madeleine Vionnet in 1926. It led to simplified forms of dress that conformed to the curves of the body. By the early 1930s, when Alix Grès began her couture career, it was the

The turquoise angora-jersey ensemble (facing page, left) inspired the author to research the work of Alix Grès. Simple rectangular shapes and bias construction are among the designer's signature traits. The skirt and cape were made from six rectangles of about the same size. The ethnic influences that repeat throughout Madame Grès career can be seen in the harem pants of the grape angora-jersey ensemble (facing page, right). The cape is made up of a large and a small rectangle joined at the shoulders; the harem pants are a length of fabric pleated at one end and triple-darted at the other. The cherry-red wool-jersey cowl at left is made up of one rectangular piece of fabric, as shown in the bottom drawing below. Openings for the hands are at the hem.



prevailing mode in both *haute couture* and *prêt-a-porter* (ready-to-wear). Madame Grès made the technique her own and became one of its greatest advocates. Even through the 1960s and 1970s, when very structured and highly constructed boxy clothes were prevalent, she continued to work with the bias technique, modifying and reworking earlier experiments. Her pieces were cut on the bias or on the straight grain and used on the bias. The bias-cut dresses of the 1930s followed the lines of the figure, but Madame Grès also found ways to use bias to skim the body rather than cling to it.

Many of the designs of Madame Grès are based on simple concepts. Those familiar with Dorothy Burnham's book *Cut My Cote* and the work of Max Tilke will recognize the relationship of Grès's pieces to regional costume. Both have a high regard for fabric and a desire to use a loom width with the least possible amount of desecration.

The turquoise angora-jersey ensemble shown in the left photo on the facing page and in the top drawing above is different in every respect from the labor-intensive gowns that were for me synonymous with the name Alix Grès. The gowns are formal, body-hugging, and of very light, smooth silk jersey; this simple ensemble is informal, body-skimming, and of a heavier, tex-tured jersey. I love it for both its tactile appeal and its economy of design.

The skirt and cape were constructed from six almost-square rectangles of nearly equal size. The skirt consists of two rectangles, and a corner of each rectangle has been cut away in a curve to form the waist.

Alix Grès, photo by her daughter.

A panel of cartridge pleating is attached to the top of the lined bodice of this gray-blue dress and is left open at the sides. The overlap conceals the hook-and-eye closure at the V of the neckline. More pleating is attached with twill tape at the hipline and stitched to the skirt a few inches below the hipline. The pleats then open to give the skirt its fullness.

The two rectangles are then seamed on each side of the waist with a zipper inset into the left side seam, and the waistline is finished with self-binding. The rectangles are cut on the straight grain so that the bias points fall at the center front and center back. The cape is constructed of four rectangles and is fashioned on the same principle as the skirt: cut on the straight grain with curved cutouts at the corners for the neck. Since the cutouts are attached to a self-fabric neckband, they are given darts or eased so that they conform to the roundness of the shoulders. The hook-and-eye closure is at the left side of the neck, and the four bias points fall at the center front, the center back, and the sides. The pieces are hemmed all around, except where they are seamed for 8 inches on the right shoulder and 14 inches on the left shoulder and at center back. Madame Grès's seams are usually pressed open and hand-finished with overcast stitching, while hems are frequently narrow and machine-stitched.

In addition to its use of straight-grain pieces on the bias, the ensemble, dating back to the '70s, illustrates another important Grès trait: the creative reworking throughout her career of a single theme—in this instance, capes. In October of 1934, the publication *Femmina* heralded, "We will have capes …" It featured an Alix ensemble of a gray cape over a gray jersey blouse and black satin skirt from the second Alix collection. The same issue also featured cape-and-skirt ensembles by other designers; Alix Grès was not unique in designing them. She was, however, unique in continuing to design them throughout her career without regard to whether they were in fashion at any given moment. Indeed, Madame Grès's best work to this day has remained apart from fashion trends.

In the grape-colored angora-jersey ensemble shown in the right photo on page 66, the large rectangle at the back drapes around and is sewn to a small rectangle at the front in two places to form shoulders and a neck opening. Ethnic inuences appear often in the work of Madame Grès. A 1935 *Harper's Bazaar* featured an Alix "Arabian" gown "with an oriental trouser skirt through which you thrust your burnished toes." This trouser skirt bears a striking resemblance to the wrap harem pants from the grape-colored angora-jersey ensemble. The pants are a slightly shaped length of fabric pleated at one end and triple-darted at each side of the other, drawn through the legs and fastened at the waist with narrow cloth bands.

The cherry-red wool-jersey cowl shown in the photo on page 67 is another of those simple once-you-know-what's-happening designs, but in fact, its construction is most difficult to analyze. The garment is made up of one very slightly shaped rectangular length of fabric. Its front, which has openings for the hands at the hem, can be draped high or cowled low. The one seam is on a diagonal in the back, and the resulting bias point falls low at the center back (see bottom drawing, page 67).

It's impossible to discuss the designs of Madame Grès without also discussing one of her signature details: pleating. The bodice of the gray-blue dress shown at left is on the bias in front, with a draped asymmetrical V-neckline and narrow dolman sleeves. Attached to the lined bodice is a panel of cartridge pleating that begins above the bustline, forming the top of a heart shape, and extends to below the bust. The pleated bust panel is stitched to the bodice at its top and is open at both sides. The overlap of the applied panel conceals the hook-and-eye front closure that begins at the V of the neckline and continues on the left to the hipline. From the bottom of the bust, a V-shaped inset extends to the hipline, where the cartridge pleating repeats. The V-shaped inset is stitched at the right and open at the left side. The pleating, which is on the straight grain, is attached with twill tape a few inches below the hip-line, stitched to the skirt 3 to 4 inches below the attachment, and then released, giving the skirt its fullness in front. The back neckline has a characteristic Grès V-shape.

In the right-hand photo on the facing page and in the drawing is a garment that is gathered at the shoulder, created for Diana Vreeland, and made of a variegated black-and-white-striped lightweight silk. The drama of the dress is enhanced by the way in which the striped fabric emphasizes the straight grain and bias. In the usual Grès manner, the gathers at the shoulder are stitched to a ribbon attached inside the shoulder seam.

Sometimes, for special clients like Diana Vreeland, Madame Grès deviates from her practice of making a toile first and works directly in the garment fabric. A bolt of cloth is brought in and unrolled, a corner of the cloth is tucked into the client's bra and pinned in place, and the draping process begins. With inimitable enthusiasm, Vreeland speaks about a Grès fitting. She adores being fitted, is in "another world" during a fitting, and always learns from the process. According to her, being fitted by Madame Grès is so extraordinary because an original garment is actually created on the body. ❑

Arlene Cooper, costume and textile historian, was assistant for the "Dance" exhibition, which is on view at the Metropolitan Museum of Art through September 6. The garment at right on the facing page is from the collection of the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT); all other garments are from the Costume Institute of the Metropolitan Museum. All photos by Brian Gulick, unless otherwise noted. Anyone who is interested in more of the work of Alix Grès should see L'Art de Madame Grès *(Tokyo: Bunka Publishing Bureau, 1980. Edited by Sahoko Hata).*

Above, this striped dress of natural-and-brown fleece has one major seam up the back on the left side, incorporating the closure. Auxiliary seams at the shoulders and across the back yoke allow for ease. The garment at right was made for Diana Vreeland. The striped silk fabric is gathered at the shoulder. The graphic visual impact is enhanced by the strategic use of straight-grain and bias-cut fabric.